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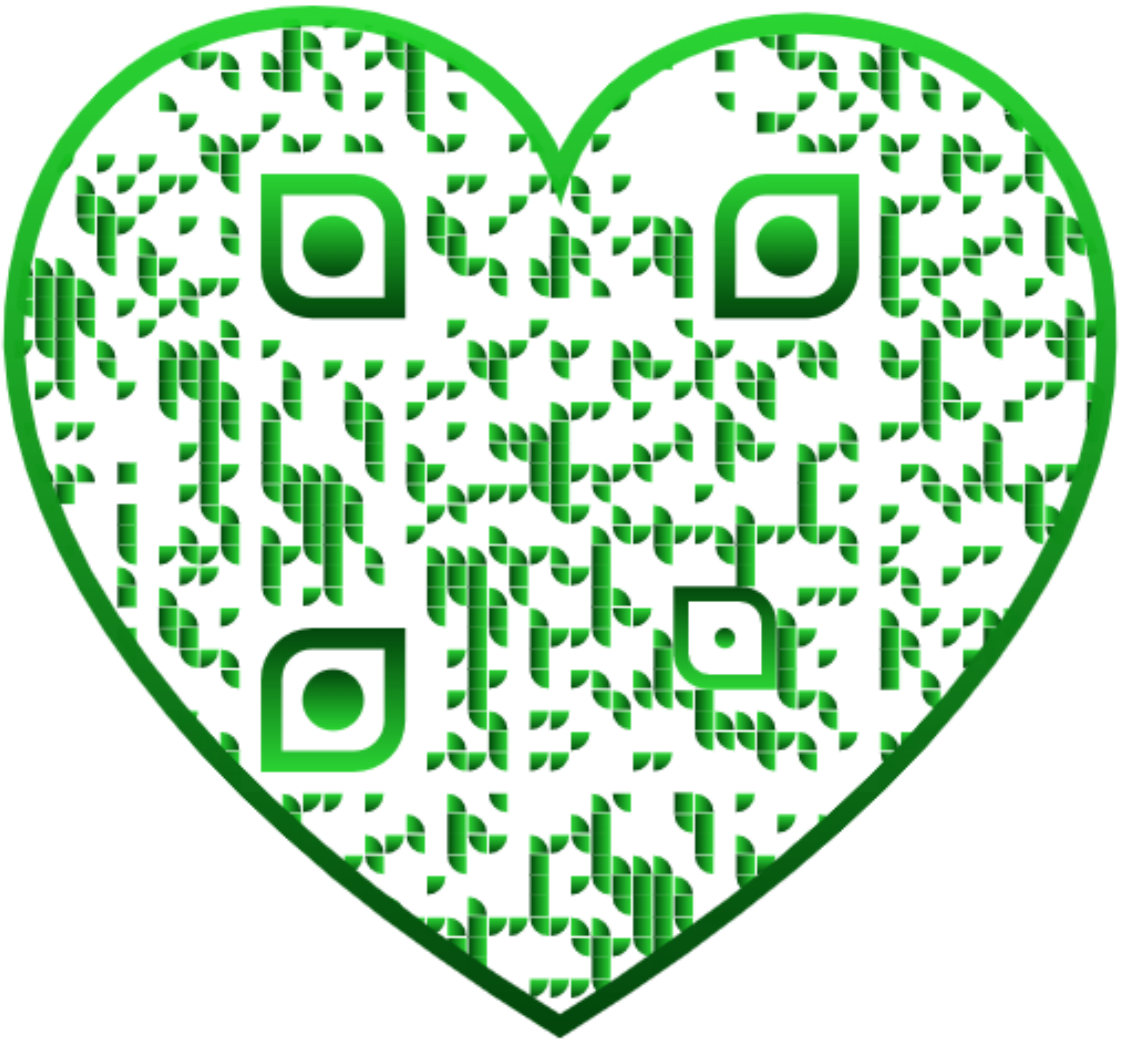

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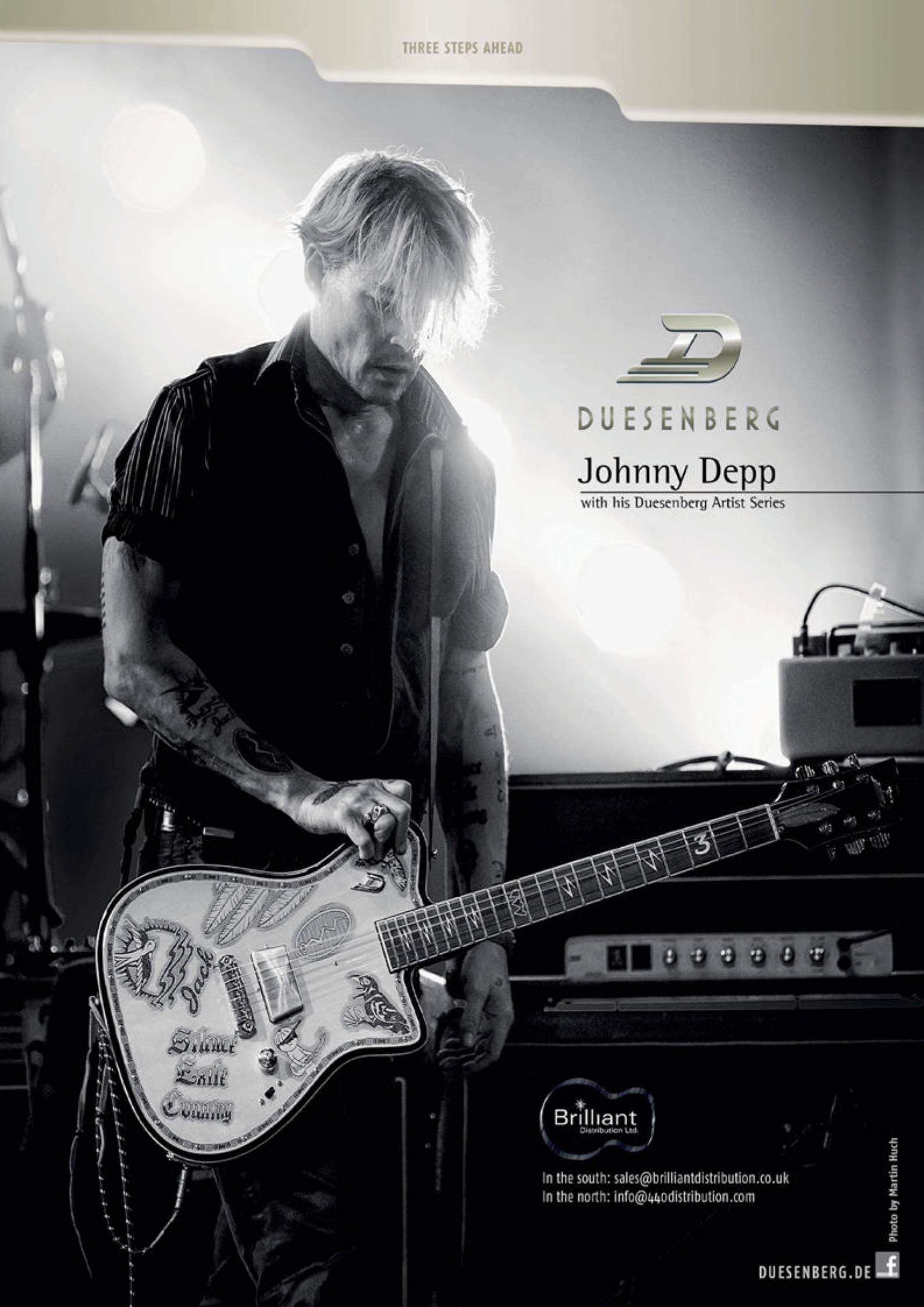
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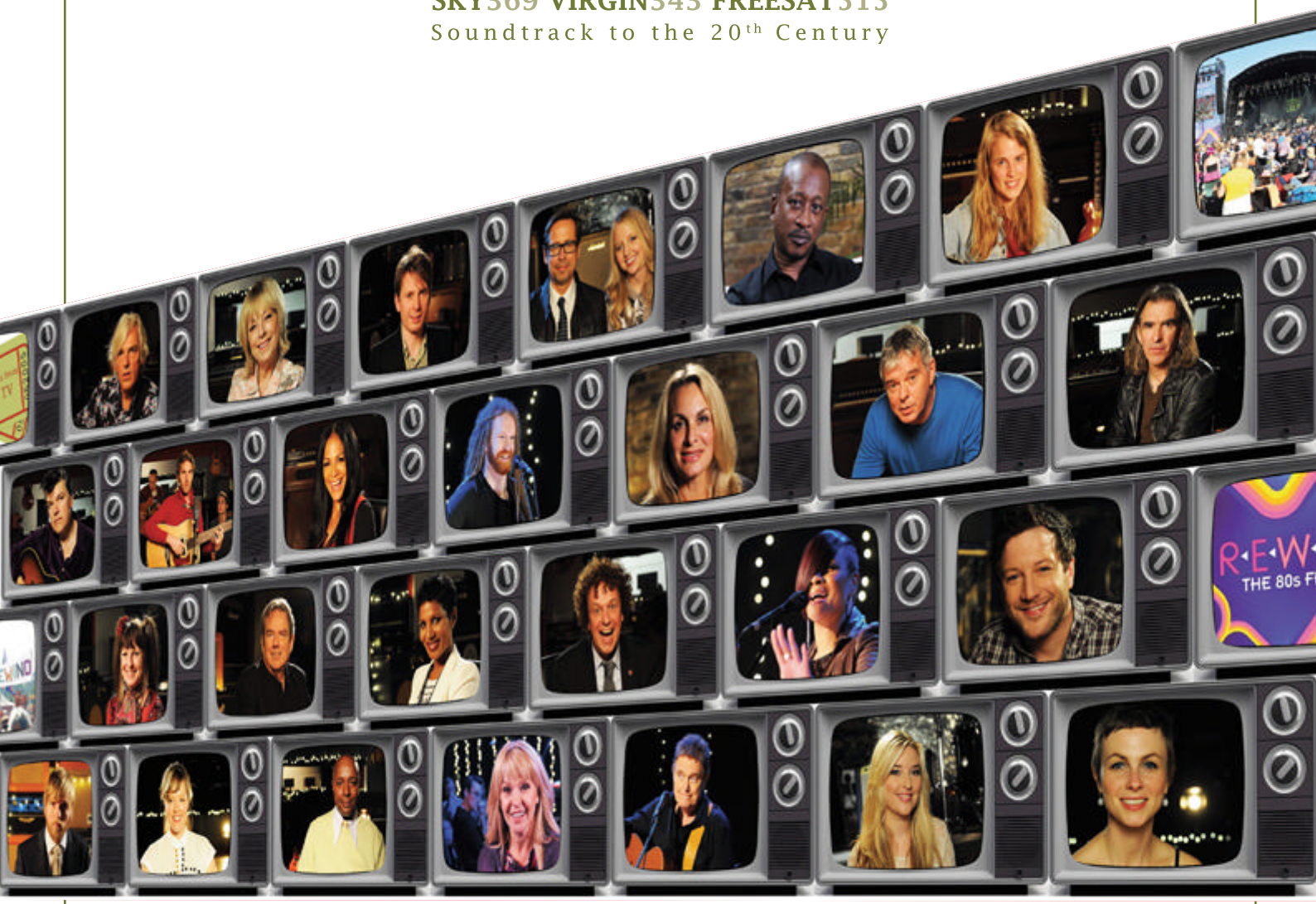
Soundtrack to the 20th Century



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Onwards and upwards...

The cover feature we ran last year on potential upgrades for your Stratocaster seemed to go down well with people – apart from, understandably, Les Paul owners, who wanted a feature dedicated to their guitar of choice. And who are we to disappoint? So you'll find in this issue plenty of immensely doable ideas, mods and tips for making your Les Paul work even harder for your playing and listening pleasure. Even if you're not a Les Paul owner, we hope it will inspire you to experiment with some upgrading on your own particular axe. Please believe us when we say that there are few joys in life to match successfully modding a guitar. It really is a feeling to savour.

Once you've digested the cover feature, feel free to mosey on down to our reviews section and cast a glance, or three, over gear from such luminaries as Boss, Hagstrom and Freshman – as well as some exclusive reviews of Orange amps. Among the features this month we talk serious gear with Doug Aldrich and Rival Sons' Scott Holiday, while bass players might want to head straight for the feature on Suzi Quatro's vintage Les Paul bass, or the bass-centric *Private Collection* you'll find within the pages of this issue. Regardless of what floats your boat instrument-wise, we hope that there's enough fret-fuelled fun to last you until the next issue. In the meantime, you can always turn to www.guitar-bass.net for string-driven goodness of all kinds. Enjoy...

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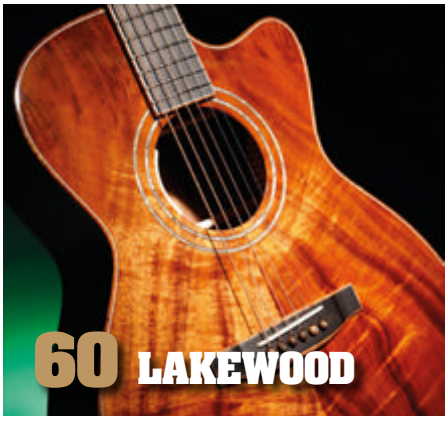

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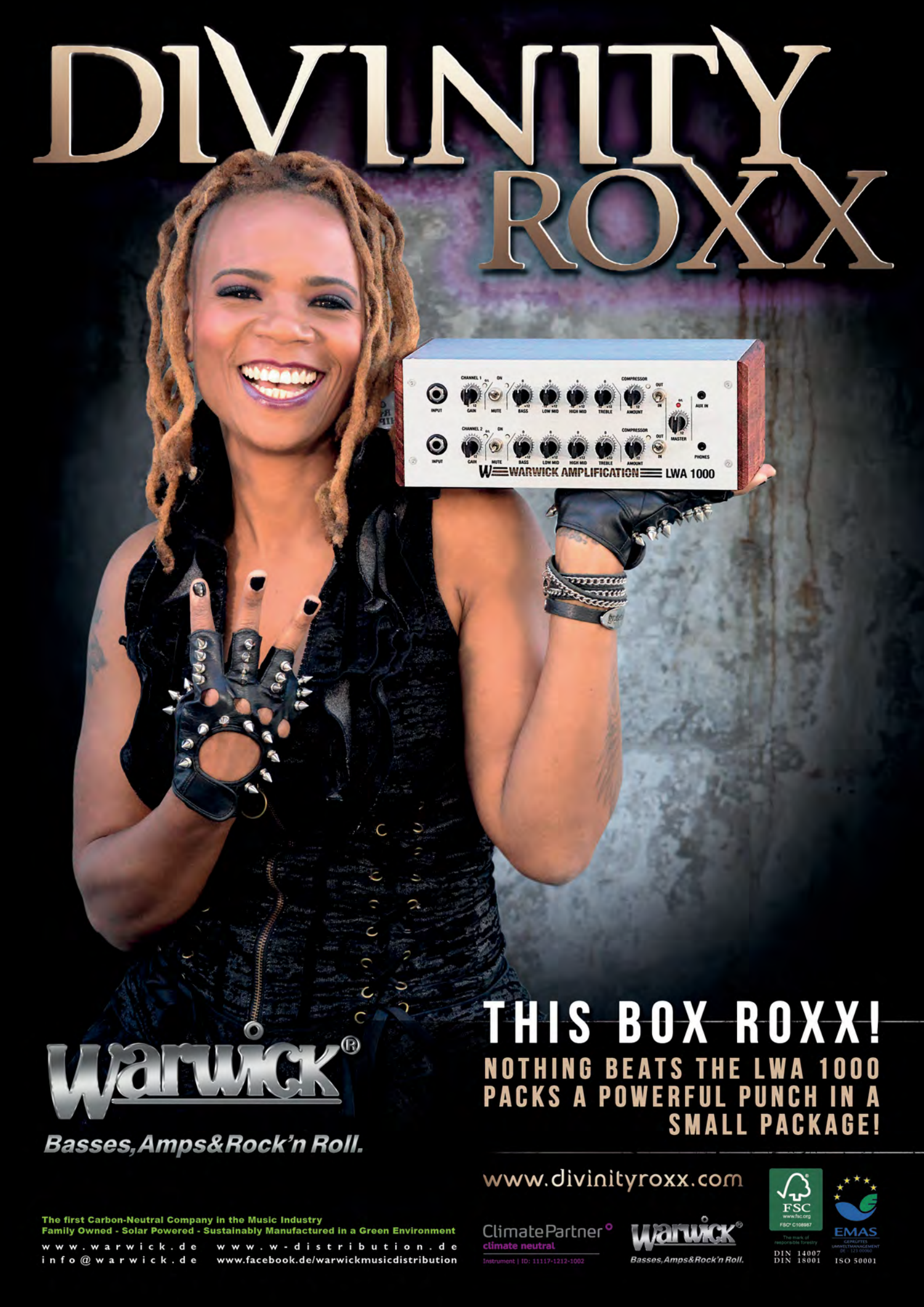

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Reverberations

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Please note, we reserve the right to edit where we feel it is appropriate, or to print extracts from longer correspondences

STAR LETTER

CONCRETE PROOF

I'm sure you are all aware of the ongoing debate re. solid body guitars and tonewoods. Following a rather heated pub discussion, and having built quite a few guitars, I decided to conduct an experiment... so I built a T-type body from concrete. The neck is from a budget Strat, and the scratchplate is solid copper. In case you're wondering, it weighs 10 kilos, roughly the same as three Les Pauls. So how does it sound? Well, surprise, surprise, just like a Tele! No more, no less... interesting. If you would like to hear and see it being played, you can watch me murdering a famous Status Quo hit by searching YouTube for '*Caroline* played on a concrete guitar'. Whatever conclusions you may reach (if any), I'm sure you'll all agree on one thing... it does look pretty damn cool, doesn't it?

Robin Aldred *via email*

G&B **We can only agree with your conclusion, Robin. Remind us never to get into a pub argument with you. Consider us proper impressed – although we're not sure that back specialists would share our feelings (and we will deliver the sensible DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME, KIDS warning to those with less sturdier spines than you obviously possess). We promised ourselves we wouldn't sully your immense achievement with any 'industrial'-based puns, so we'll stop now...**

Robin's 30lb guitar: just right for that Cast tribute...

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FAMILIAR FEBRUARY...

I always enjoy the magazine (and have subscribed since the first ever issue many moons ago) but February's issue had three points of particular interest to me. Firstly, The front cover shows a 60W Laney head identical to one that I used to own. I traded it in long ago to help my daughter buy a flute; a worthy sacrifice, but I still wish I had it sometimes!

Secondly, *Soundtrack Of My Life* featured Richard Durrant, who is local to us here in Shoreham-by-Sea. He has been an acquaintance for many years and my wife has helped teach his children at school. It's good to see such a diversity of guitarists being featured like this.

New album from *Soundtrack* subject Richard Durrant

Finally, Martyn Casserly's article on iPad use for guitarists was interesting in particular as at the bottom of page 64 the pictured iPad had music from Rend Collective on it. They write music that is widely used in Christian worship at churches and festivals. As well as playing in a couple of regular secular bands over the years I have been involved in trying to bring modern, culturally relevant music styles into our local church for a long time. It was hard going in the 1980s when we started to bring in drum kits and electric guitars alongside the piano and pipe organ (not to universal approval). Personally I like to try and bring in a little blues and Gilmouresque nuances to give the songs a different feel sometimes. We also encourage young musicians who are learning to rehearse with us and go on to join the regular worship band. Being a smallish family church without an excess of musicians we get them to play alongside as soon as they are ready. I think that it can be an important and safe environment to encourage young guitarists, alongside encouraging music in schools and so on, and gives them a feel for playing live in front of people knowing that they are most likely to be appreciative.

David Buck *via email*

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

I only started learning to play in my early thirties – I always wanted to, but didn't have the discipline as a kid. When I became a dad I wanted to be able to play songs for the kids, so after they'd been packed them off to bed I spent many an evening learning chords and struggling with beginner tunes (very quietly). It took years to get to a point where I could say I could play without feeling like a liar. The reason why I'm telling you this is that my true bugbear is those who think learning to play the guitar is easy. If it hadn't been for some specific circumstances – young dad trying to save money and not able to go out much – I don't think I'd have ever got through the many frustrating nights I experienced where I nearly smashed my guitar against the wall. I'm not a great player, and I'm not saying it's as hard a learning the piano (I've never tried, so I don't know), but it does wind me up when people think that it doesn't take work. My advice to any friends or family who make any smart remarks? Hand them the guitar and tell them: 'Go on then!' Works every time...

Rich Saunderson *via email*

Woke up this mornin'... NEWS

Holy Grails For Sale

The LP Custom that was the test-bed for many of Les Paul's sonic experiments and Chet Atkins 'Dark Eyes' Gretsch, which served as a prototype for the famed 6120, are both up for auction

Two pivotal instruments in electric guitar history are to be offered for sale on the 19 February in New York by Guernsey's auction house. The first is a Gibson Les Paul made in 1953 that was given to Les himself in 1954 so he could assess it and suggest improvements on the design. It became his own personal test-bed, not only for the Les Paul Custom, but also for much of his constant tinkering with the format for the next 20 years. Initially the guitar was simply known as 'Black' but soon it was dubbed 'Black Beauty', a name that was adopted for all future LP Custom models. He played this guitar for 20 years, not only on the *Les Paul And Mary Ford* TV show, but also during countless stage performances and recordings, making it a pretty important and influential instrument. In 1976 Les made a gift of the guitar to his personal luthier, technician and close friend Tom Doyle, and it's resided with him ever since.

Doyle was also made guardian of Chet Atkins' famous 'Dark Eyes' Gretsch, which was a working prototype for perhaps the company's most famous guitar, the 6120. It was the more favoured of two test guitars Gretsch made for Atkins (the other was clad in the now iconic orange finish). Chet used the instrument as his benchmark for the experiments that led to his preferred version of the 6120 and other signature models we know today, and it was one of the first guitars ever fitted with humbucking pickups (in this case Filter'Trons) to appear in public. Interestingly, unlike the standard issue 6120s, Dark Eyes has no f-holes – the ones you can see are painted on in the style of the later Country Gentleman. Chet can be seen playing this guitar on old TV footage from 1956-'57 not least on performances of the composition that gave the guitar its name, *Dark Eyes*. The auction will take place at the Arader Galleries on Madison Avenue. You'll find more info at www.guernseys.com.

Jeff Golub 1955-2015

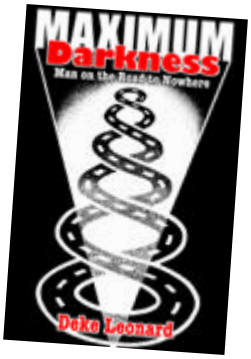
Smooth jazz guitarist Jeff Golub, also known for his work with Rod Stewart, Billy Squier and Tina Turner, has died aged 59 from progressive supranuclear palsy – a rare brain disorder. Golub was born in Akron, Ohio, and took up guitar aged eight after his father took him to the Grand Ole Opry. His ability led to him attending the renowned Berklee College of Music in Boston and studying jazz guitar with Mick Goodrick. Golub became Billy Squier's sideman in 1980, recording seven albums and touring the world before striking out with the first of a dozen solo outings, *Unspoken Words*, in 1988. Turns in Rod Stewart's and Tina Turner's bands kept his profile high but Golub's condition caused him to lose his eyesight in 2011; in 2012 he fell onto subway tracks but was luckily hauled to safety. His final release, a fine collaboration with British keysman Brian Auger entitled *Train Keeps A Rolling*, came in 2012.

Meet & Jam.com

A new website, www.meet&jam.com, is taking online connections between musicians into the real world by organising simultaneous 'jam nights' across the country. The latest round of events takes place on Saturday 7 Feb, just after this magazine arrives on the shelves, but future Meet & Jam nights are promised. The website offers links and easy booking of over 150 recording and rehearsal studios all over the UK and a classified section to hook up with 'jam buddies', prospective new band members and music teachers – and it's completely free to place an ad. Potentially a very handy resource.

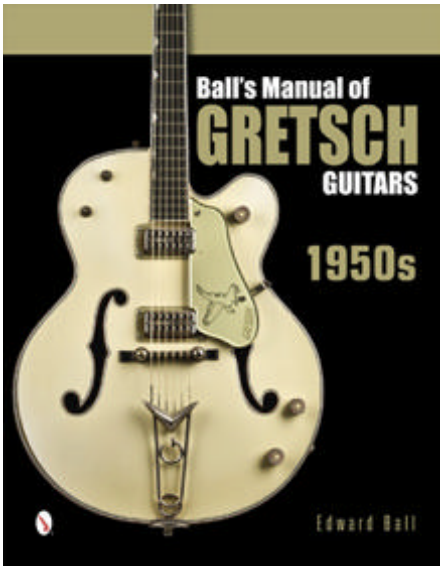
Deke Leonard's Maximum Darkness

Guitarist and frontman Deke Leonard was a founder member of Welsh prog rockers Man, serving with them, off and on, from 1968 until 2004. These days, though, he is fast becoming just as well known for his engrossing autobiographies about life in a rock'n'roll band. *Maximum Darkness: Man On The Road To Nowhere* is his third book in the trilogy that has also spawned *Maybe I Should've Stayed In Bed* and *Rhinos, Winos & Lunatics*. It picks up his epic journey in 1977 as he fights to resurrect his solo career and chronicles Man's reformation in 1983. It's one hell of a ride: the book is £12.99 from www.northdownpublishing.co.uk.



'50S GRETSCHES

Ed Ball is perhaps the foremost historian of the Gretsch, and his book *Ball's Manual Of Gretsch Guitars: 1950s* is an invaluable tome for any devotee. Original factory records were lost to a fire in 1973 but after some exhaustive serial number research and cataloguing of large numbers of vintage guitars Ball has managed to create an ordered timeline for all the key '50s models, establishing accurate dates for Gretsch's ever-evolving and frequently overlapping features. The results are concisely laid out and accompanied by photography of the highest order. After a primer on labels, serial numbers and key features, the book deals with each specific model. Tables at the back determine which bridges, Bigsbys and bracing are correct for any '50s model based on production batch numbers from 1947 to 1960. Order from www.gazellebookservices.co.uk for £33.50.



Fender host Learn To Play Day in London

As we highlighted last month, Learn To Play Day takes place on 21 March with shops and other venues across the country offering all-comers free guitar lessons. Fender has now announced it is hosting its own event at the Weston Roof Pavilion in the Royal Festival Hall on London's Southbank where visitors can enjoy a free lesson from a Registry of Guitar Tutors (RGT) instructor on either electric, acoustic, bass or ukulele. Details of how to sign up for will be posted on Fender GBI's social media sites – www.facebook.com/fendergbi or www.twitter.com/fendergbi. There's sure to be more events revealed in the coming weeks all over the country, so keep tabs on www.learntoplayday.com to find one near you.

GET TO GRIPS WITH FRETLESS GUITARS

Fretless Guitar: The Definitive Guide is a new book by Jeff Berg which aims to educate us on the benefits of a smooth fingerboard unadulterated by frets. It features the full history of the form, including the fretless experiments of John Lennon, Jimi Hendrix and Frank Zappa; tutorials on scales, chords and alternate tuning; a fretless guitar dictionary; and a catalogue of fretless players and fretless events around the world. There are tips on converting a normal guitar into a fretless, building a fretless guitar from scratch, and a guide on how to set up a fretless guitar once you're done. If you're still unwilling to part with your fretwire there's a 'pros and cons' section with all the FAQs answered to alleviate your fears. Available exclusively from http://fretlessguitar.co.uk at £14.99.

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Album reviews

Chris Spedding
JOYLAND
Cleopatra

One of the true godfathers of British twang returns with an album of essential cuts. Among the famous cast list that aids and abets Spedding are Glen Matlock on the slab of precision-point abandonment that is *Café Racer*, Johnny Marr for the spaghetti western swampfest of *Heisenberg*, and Free's Andy Fraser, who provides the brooding bottom end for the spike-fulled *Shock Treatment*.

Steve Earle & The Dukes
TERRAPLANE
New West

'So might as well learn how to make this guitar talk/Somebody said old Bob Johnson came down this way...' sings Steve Earle on *The Tennessee Kid*, and with the album title also giving a nod towards the blues legend you'll never mistake this LP for a Disney soundtrack. Earle's latest record is full of plenty of fine roots-fuelled guitar, and it was produced by RS Field (Buddy Guy, John Mayall).

The Wave Pictures
GREAT BIG FLAMINGO BURNING MOON
Moshi Moshi

Co-written and produced by another great, left-field British institution Billy Childish, The Wave Pictures may have just released their finest album to date. Dave Tattershall's way of coaxing sharp yet loveable refrains from his no-pedals-allowed setup is a joy to behold. For those who adore teetering-on-the-edge-of-collapse slices of rocking pop, this delivers all that and much, much more.

Revolution Saints
REVOLUTION SAINTS
Frontiers

How many rock titans does it take to make a good album? Well, in this case, it takes three: drummer/vocalist Deen Castronovo (Journey) and bassist Jack Ranger (Night Ranger) joining forces with ex-Whitesnake guitar-slinger Doug Aldrich. Heavy melodic rock is the band's natural stock-in-trade, and Aldrich proves time and again why he remains a master exponent both of tight riffing and of heartfelt lead salvos.

Thunder
WONDER DAYS
earMusic

Having long established a reputation for being one of the finest British rock bands around, Thunder keep up the good work on *Wonder Days*. The title track boasts the kind of epic workouts that Led Zep would be glad to call their own, while *The Thing That I Want* and *Resurrection Day* possess top-notch melodies you'll hum in the shower. Throw in the superior ballad that is *Broken* and you have yourself a great record.

Blues Caravan 2014
JONES, SKJOLBERG & CASTIGLIA
Ruf

The Ruf Records touring showcase of new talent is celebrating its 10th year of existence with some vital live cuts from three rising stars. The trio, comprising the UK's Laurence Jones, Christina Skjolberg from Norway and Albert Castiglia from America, all go to provide a whole lotta proof that the latest generation of blues guitar players are well worth checking out. Long may the caravan trail continue.

UFO
A CONSPIRACY OF STARS
SPV/Steamhammer

The multi-million selling classic rockers return to remind the world once more that, regards of the line-up, no one quite does it like UFO. Sure, Phil Mogg's impassioned vocals still get the job done, but fret-fanciers will no doubt be concentrating more on Vinnie Moore's lead playing, which is the very definition of the term 'tasty'. *Battle Of The Left-Hand Gun* is one of this project's several highlights.

Black Star Riders
KILLER INSTINCT
Nuclear Blast

The Riders return for a second bout of wondrous twin-guitar abandon, cheerfully cocking a snook at all the naysayers who believed Scott Gorham to be out of his mind in starting a band that drew head-on inspiration from classic Thin Lizzy without banking on name recognition. Gorham's six-string marriage with Damon Johnson is truly a glorious union – one that consistently gets your motor running.

Radio Londra
ZIRILLI, BOSCAGIN, STANLEY & MULLEN
Trio

The brainchild of Italian drummer Enzo Zirilli, responsible for an artistic exchange program introducing top UK musicians to Italian audiences and vice versa, Radio Londra boasts two jazz guitar greats in Jim Mullen and Luca Boscagin. The interplay between the two on reworked standards and the odd curveball – like the Stones' *Satisfaction* – highlights their differing yet very complementary styles.

SNAP JUDGEMENTS

Devil's Train
II
earMusic

The delightfully unreconstructed rockers return with more blues added to the mix. It's all the better for it – and they do a fine rendition of *Born To Be Wild*, too

H.E.A.T
LIVE IN LONDON
earMusic

This release, recorded mainly at the Garage in London last year, cements the Swedish combo's reputation as bringers of the hard-rocking party

Funeral For A Friend
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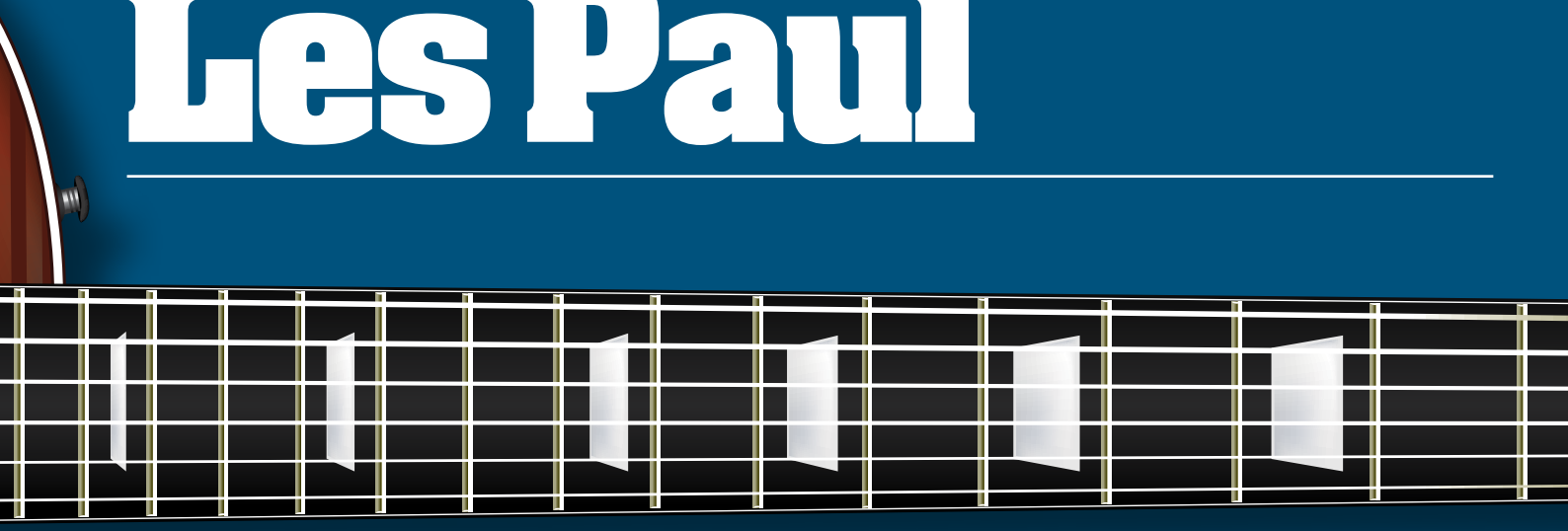
25 Ways To Upgrade Your Les Paul



From easy, zero-cost modifications that take a few short minutes to tone-expanding wiring changes, clever vibrato technology and even head-to-toe boutique vintage makeovers, there are many ways to personalise and improve your Les Paul. **Huw Price** reveals our pick of the very best

Even if you're disinclined to undertake woodwork or have at it with a soldering iron, there's still plenty of scope for modifying, customising and upgrading your Les Paul. Broadly speaking the categories break down into cosmetic changes, electrical modifications, and hardware upgrades.

The iconic models Gibson made during the late 1950s do not enchant all Les Paul players, but for some it has become an obsession. Original examples are in short supply given that only 1500 or so were made, and the market value has sky-rocketed accordingly. Unsurprisingly, an industry of parts suppliers now serves the needs of Les Paul players wishing to create their own vintage replicas, and this is the mindset that drives most of the cosmetic changes.

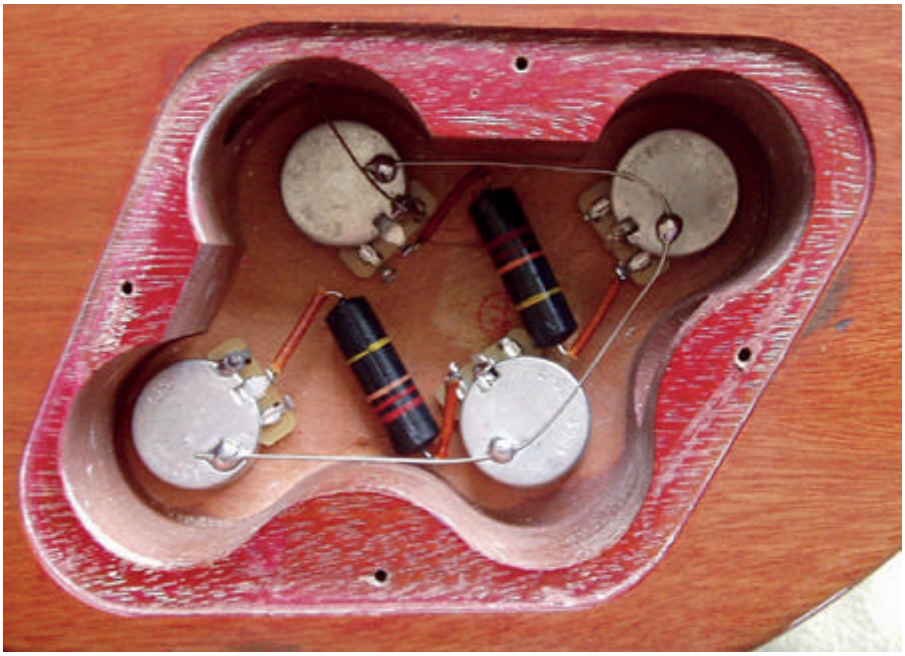
The vintage ethos drives many of the electrical modifications too, with circuit reconfigurations, capacitor tweaks and the ubiquitous PAF replica pickups. However, this is one area where Les Paul players need not be bound by 'vintage correctness'. There are easy and affordable ways to customise and expand your range of tones, and players are no longer restricted to conventional control layouts or even P90 and PAF-style pickups.

In the past many Les Paul players shied away from hardware upgrades because they were reluctant to drill holes in a quality guitar. Nowadays the range of bridges, tailpieces, tremolos and tuners that will slot right in place is extensive. However, you should be aware that USA-made Les Pauls are fitted with hardware that conforms to imperial measurements, whereas those of Far Eastern manufacture – like Epiphones and the various Japanese 'replicas' – require metric hardware.

So here are 25 of our top tips for modifying Les Pauls – or SGs, ES-335s and more besides. Some are very costly while others are cheap, and many won't cost you a thing. Have fun and don't do anything irreversible that you may come to regret.

1 ’50s WIRING

This is just about the simplest modification you can perform on your Gibson, or indeed any guitar – and it doesn’t cost a thing. They call it ’50s wiring because it’s the way Gibson hooked things up until around 1962 or so, and the only actual difference was that they connected the tone control to the output (ie. middle) tag of the volume control rather than the input (ie. outer) tag. With ’50s wiring you can turn down your volume control without the sound muddying up quite so much, and the volume and tone controls also become more interactive, which may be the reason why Gibson changed it. If you decide you don’t like it, simply reverse the procedure.



This picture shows the first stage of a ‘50s style wiring installation. Note how the ‘bumblebee’ capacitors are connected to the centre tags of the volume controls.

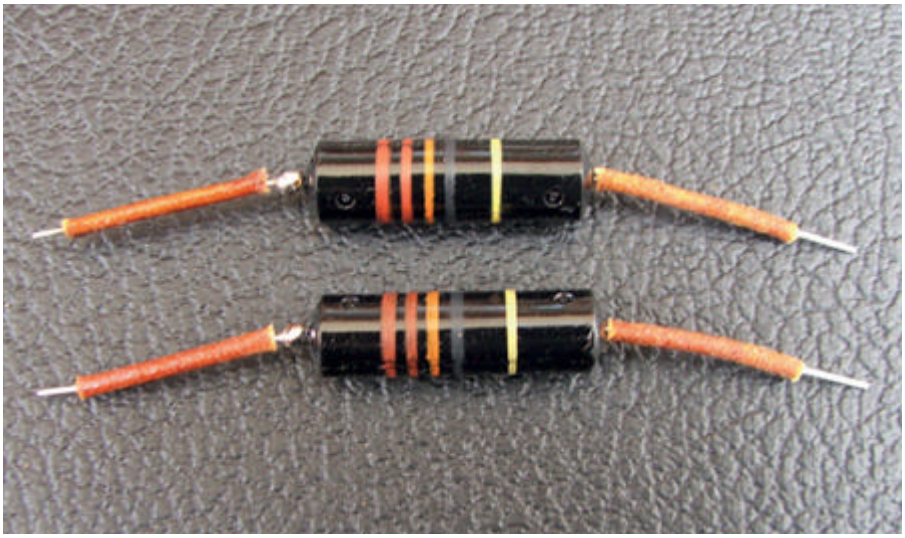
2 TAILPIECES

Gibson’s first stop tailpiece – the ones fitted to the ’50s collectors’ guitars that cost the same as a decent apartment – was originally made from aluminium, but later on this changed to zinc, which remains stock on current models. Some players claim aluminium gives extra woodiness and more treble with a wider dynamic range, while zinc fans argue that their preferred metal has more low end and sustain. Others will tell you that they can’t hear any difference whatsoever... but even so, it’s a simple and reversible DIY modification. The Gibson version costs around £120, but alternatives from Faber, Pigtail, Gotoh, Kluson and others start from about £30. We believe aluminium sounds different, but even if you can’t hear it, at least your Lester will be a bit lighter.

Fitting an aluminium tailpiece is a cheap and easy modification that improves the tone of a Les Paul for many players. Faber in Germany offer aluminium tailpieces with various degrees of relicing.

3 TONE CAP SWAPS AND UPGRADES

It is incorrect to say that tone capacitors have no effect on the sound of a guitar when the tone controls are fully up, because there is always some treble bleed when a tone circuit is installed... so the value of the capacitor will determine the frequency at which roll-off occurs. Some players say they can discern sonic differences between different types of capacitor of the same value. The originals were 0.022uF paper/oil types; repros are available or you can use Mallory 150s, Sprague Orange Drops or Vitamin Qs. Some like to experiment with different values too for increased or decreased treble roll-off. Our best advice is to experiment!



0.022uF paper/oil capacitors nicknamed ‘bumblebees’ were installed in original Les Pauls. Replicas are available but not all are paper/oil. Russian made K40Y and K42Y paper-oil capacitors are readily available cost effective equivalents.

4 COVER REMOVAL

This is one of the earliest mods players performed on their humbucker-equipped Gibsons (Clapton’s Beano burst was a classic example). It was generally thought at the time that removing the covers made the pickups sound louder. In fact players who removed their covers were probably just hearing more treble, because the capacitive effect of the covers caused high frequency roll-off. Vintage nickel silver covers were very thin and kept treble loss to a minimum, while later covers, – especially thick brass ones – did the upper frequency response no favours. The principle also applies to Telecaster neck pickups, which can be de-muffled by snipping the bridging wire from the cover to the negative wire.

Covers are usually held in place with two blobs of solder. Use a Stanley knife to cut through the solder, being extremely careful with your fingers and the pickup itself, then lift the cover off. Here we see an ‘uncovered’ double black Shed PAF Daddy.

5 TOP WRAPPING

In addition to providing an anchor point for the strings, the stop tailpiece ensures that the strings have a suitable break-angle over the saddles. However, when the tailpiece is screwed tight to the body, the angle might be too sharp and the strings may end up contacting the back of the bridge, which increases the chances of string breakage. One solution is to feed the strings through the tailpiece from the pickup side and wrap them *over* the top of the tailpiece. Proponents claim that you get the tonal benefits of tailpiece-to-body contact coupled with more sustain and a slinkier playing feel.

This is one mod you can easily try for zero cost. Not everybody likes the result, but many players who try the 'wrap over' trick – including Bonamassa, Wylde and Gibbons – never go back.

6 NUT JOBS

Much is made of the type of material used for nuts. Traditionalists insist on bone, some prefer the slippery attributes of high-tech materials like Graphtech, while Lester players like Zakk Wylde famously prefer brass. Currently Gibson installs a variety of nuts depending on the model, including an unusual 'zero fret' device that allows player to adjust string height. Even so, a nut can only affect the tone of open strings, so the main reason for installing a new nut would be if the slots are inaccurately cut or they prove to be too deep after a re-fret. For vintage authenticity you might consider installing a 6/6 grade nylon nut. Pre-cut nylon nuts are available, but often at a steep price. Alternatively, you can buy a sheet of 6/6 nylon and make one up.

Discussions about guitar setup and playability often overlook the importance of a well-cut and properly slotted nut. This may be one for a professional luthier, but you can choose various materials. Here's one being made by reader Tony Berrington in correct '50s spec nylon.

7 NYLON SADDLES

Nylon isn't generally regarded as a tone-enhancing material, but here it is again. Les Pauls have always had metal saddles, and the originals were nickel-plated brass. Gibson's early Tun-O-Matic-equipped semi-acoustics had the same, but Gibson were fitting nylon saddles on the semis by the mid '60s. When comparing a '60 ES-330 with a '64 ES-330 we noticed the '64 had a sweeter and more resonant acoustic tone, and a quick bridge swap demonstrated that the nylon saddles were responsible. If you want a similar effect, try some nylon saddles on your Lester... or mix up metal for the wound strings with nylon for the un-wound ones, like Joe Bonamassa.

Joe Bonamassa favours nylon saddles for the plain strings on his Gibson signature model. He's a 'top wrap' kinda guy too.

8 ALTERNATIVE PICKUPS

Due to the way that they're mounted, pickup-swapping was never a big thing among Les Paul players; chopping Fenders was always an easier and less scary proposition. These days things are simpler and all kinds of options are now available for humbucker and P90-equipped Les Pauls. If you want an early '50s tone, there are plenty of P90s in PAF mounts... or what about getting Gretschy with an 'English mount' and P90-sized Filter'Tron or DeArmond soundalikes from TV Jones. Alternatively, Seymour Duncan's P-Rails gives P90, PAF and Fender-like sounds at the flick of a switch.

The Seymour Duncan P-Rails has to be the most versatile drop-in pickup replacement for Les Pauls. It combines a P90 and a narrow single coil with a blade magnet. The coils can be used individually or combined in series for humbucker-type tones.

9 RELIC PLASTICS

Without wishing to offend anybody, getting into replica plastic parts for Les Pauls will lead you straight to the lunatic fringe of the relicing scene. Obsessives often engage in heated discussions about colour, texture and even smell. Put it this way, you will know your bendy butyrate M69 rings are right when they smell of sick and they cost you a mere £200. Other über-expensive items may include single-ring tuner buttons and genuine Italian celluloid fingerboard inlays. Then there's knobs, switch tips and poker chips to consider. Vintage Haven, Montreux, Dead Mint Club, Monster Relic, Retro Vibe and Time Machine Collection can make your vintage replica look amazing... but it will sound exactly the same.

Relic parts like these Time Machine Collection M69 rings don't come cheap, but they look a lot better than the ones Gibson use.

10 TAILPIECE CLAMPING

Traditional tailpiece studs do not grip stop tailpieces at all – the only thing holding the tailpiece in position is the pull of the strings. Often you'll see tailpieces tilting forward, and it's claimed that better tone can be achieved by securing the tailpiece more securely. Tone Pros sell a range of replacement studs that comprise a stud and a separate cap that screws down onto the top of the tailpiece, while the Faber Tone Lock kits consist of replacement studs with spacer rings of various depths, so your tailpiece will be gripped and the original appearance is maintained – especially if you go for a reliced set. The spacers also allow you to set the tailpiece higher off the body for a looser feel.

The obvious way to keep the tailpiece fixed in position is to screw it flat to the body. Setting it higher softens the break angle, much like top-wrapping, but the tailpiece may need to be secured. Tone Pros locking studs provide an effective solution.

11 TUNER SWAP

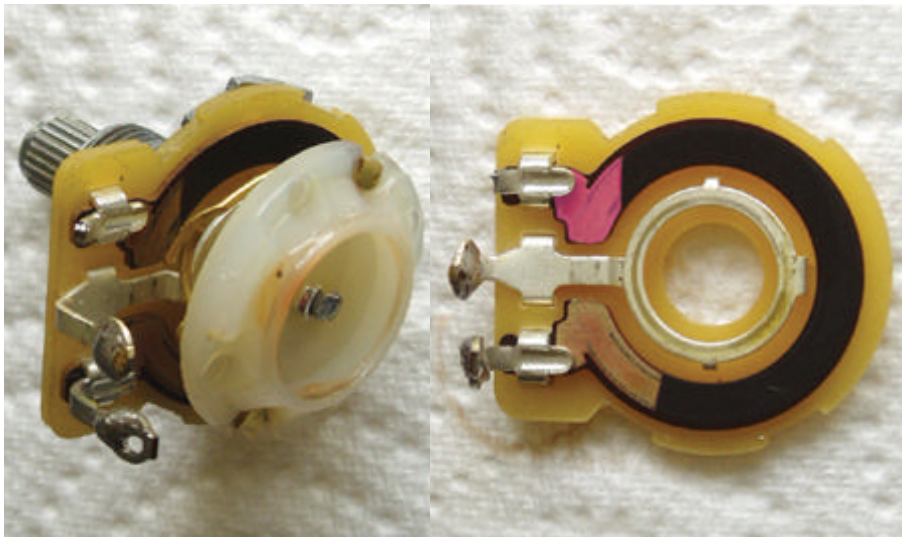
Most of the '50s Les Pauls associated with big-name players have diecast tuners – with the exception of Billy Gibbon's Pearly Gates. Taking a Black & Decker to the headstock of a vintage LP may seem horrific nowadays, but diecast tuners require wider holes than Klusons and players were more concerned with keeping their guitars in tune than originality. Increased mass at the headstock may have enhanced sustain, too. Nowadays players are equally likely to retrofit vintage-style tuners, but you'll need conversion bushes to do it. You'll get vintage looks and livelier dynamics – and, contrary to vintage lore, decent Kluson-style tuners hold their tuning just as well as diecasts.

There was a time when players removed their Klusons and fitted Grovers and Schallers for improved tuning stability. These days the trend is the opposite, and here are a couple of Kluson-style repros from Fake 58 – one with a simple 'aged' button and the other with a shrunken and shrivelled button.

12 NO-LOAD TONE POTS

A lack of clarity and treble is a common Les Paul-related complaint, but what can you do when pickup-swapping isn't an option? Whenever a guitar is fitted with tone controls, there is always some treble bleed through the tone circuit (you can test this and see for yourself by disconnecting the tone circuit from the volume control).

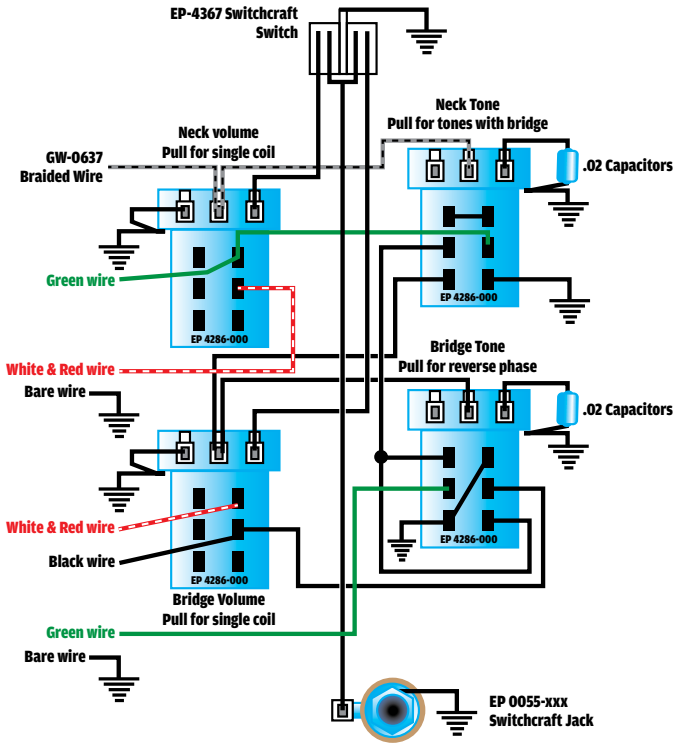
Installing a 'no load' tone control potentiometer ensures that at the top of the turn the pot clicks into a position that disconnects it from the circuit and eliminates treble bleed. Turn the pot down, and it will function as a normal tone control. You can buy them or make your own, and you'll notice the biggest difference in the neck position.



Installing no-load potentiometers for your tone controls may help to make your Les Paul sound brighter and clearer. They're easy to buy, but it's almost as easy to make them yourself.

13 JIMMY PAGE WIRING

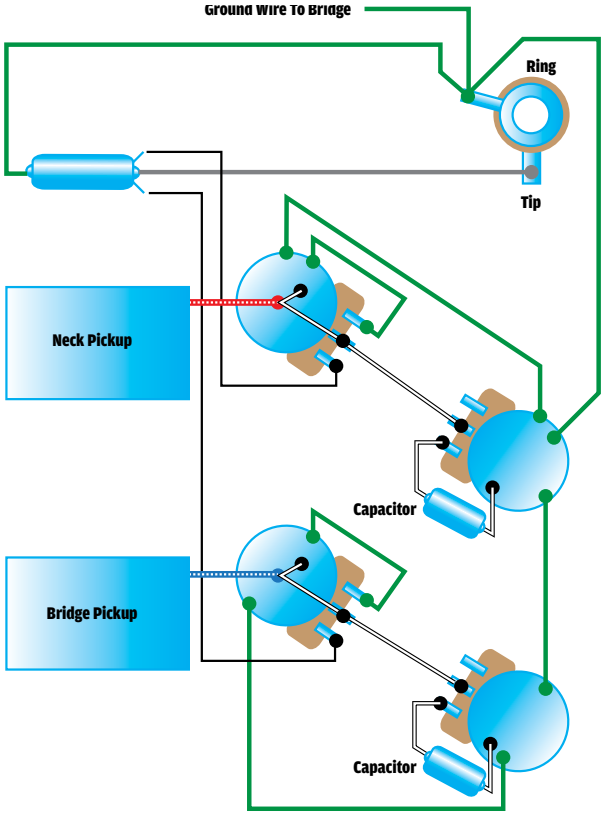
Any Les Paul with two humbuckers is actually equipped with four pickups – two pairs of single coils with each pair wired in series. When you think about the range of tones you can get from a regular Stratocaster, it's obvious Les Pauls have a lot of un-tapped potential. Jimmy Page certainly thought so, and he had four push/pull switches fitted in his 1960 Les Paul. The push/pulls under the volume controls switch between regular humbucker and single coil tones. The push/pull under the neck tone control is a series/parallel switch, and the one under the bridge tone control switches the pickups in and out of phase for Peter Green-style tones. If your pickups have vintage-style braided wires, they'll need to be replaced with multicore wires for this mod.



Jimmy Page used a lot of trick wiring with his vintage Les Pauls for out-of-phase and single-coil tones. A definitive schematic has yet to emerge, but here's one that will effectively do the job.

14 NO CUT OUT MOD

The regular Les Paul wiring scheme means that the controls are somewhat interactive. One of the oddities is the way that turning down one of the volume controls kills both pickups when the pickup selector is in the middle setting. Some players like it because you can do that stuttering staccato trick where you hit a power chord and 'play' it with the switch, but it drives other players bananas. Fortunately it's easy to de-couple the volume controls by wiring the volume controls backwards; just follow the diagram. The downside of the mod is more noticeable treble loss when you turn down the volume controls, so treble bleed caps may be required. Try 330pF for starters.



If you would like your volume controls to be completely independent and eliminate the cut out in the middle position, it's a simple case of reversing the input and output connections on the volume potentiometers.

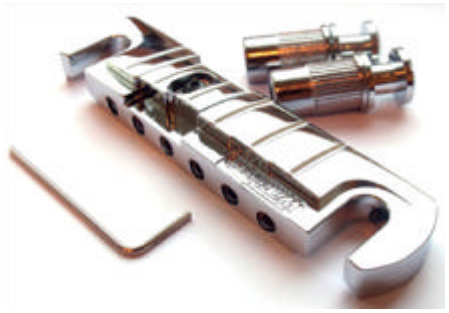
15 NO-HOLE BIGSBY INSTALLATION

Filled holes in the tops of vintage Les Pauls are the evidence of long-removed Bigsby vibratos. To some a Les Paul with a Bigsby looks just as incongruous as a Gretsch without one. Nevertheless, we think Lesters look the nuts with a Bigsby – and you can now install Bigsbys on Les Pauls without drilling any holes at all, thanks to a company called Vibramate. A specially-designed bracket attaches in place of the stop tailpiece to secure the front of the Bigsby unit, and the strap button screw clamps it at the back. This do-it-yourself installation can be done within minutes, but you'll need a fresh set of strings too.

The Vibramate system allows you to fix a Bigsby onto your Les Paul without drilling any holes because it utilises the tailpiece studs and the strap screw to hold the vibrato in place.

16 BRIDGE REPLACEMENT

Early '50s style Les Pauls and Les Paul Juniors had wrap over tailpieces, so intonation can be compromised. Fortunately wrap over replacement bridges with adjustable intonation are readily available. Vintage fans generally prefer ABR-1 style aluminium Tun-O-Matic bridges with brass saddles to the later all-zinc Nashville bridges. They can be swapped, but they require thumbwheel posts with a different diameter. Browns Guitars and Faber offer the necessary conversion posts. For replacement wrap over bridges and ABR-1 replicas try Wilkinson, Pigtail, Badass, Hipshot, Schaller, Gotoh, Tone Pros, Callaham and Gibson too.



Trevor Wilkinson's take on the wrap-over tailpiece is sleek and elegant. It has a movable saddle for the B and G that gives you a much better chance of achieving accurate intonation.

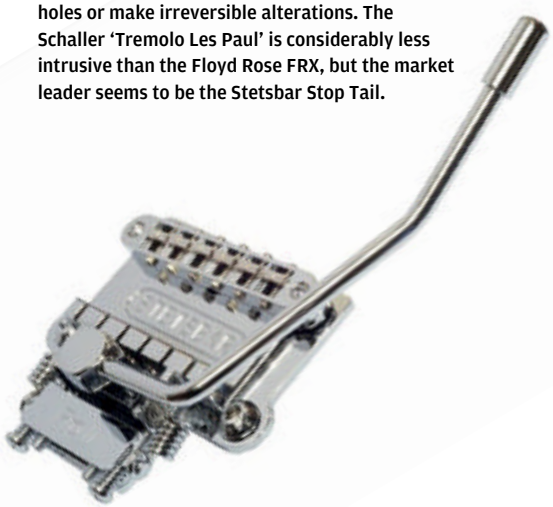
17 MULTI-POSITION SWITCH

Installing extra switches in Fenders was never a cause for concern because if you changed your mind, you could always buy a new pickguard to replace the one you had perforated. Understandably most Les Paul owners have baulked at the idea of drilling holes in their guitars, so the options for extra pickup configurations have largely been confined to push/pull and push/push switches – so the recent introduction of a six-way toggle switch that fits in place of the regular three way is an exciting development. Called the Free-Way Switch, it provides Lester players with countless options. Jimmy Page had one installed in the Les Paul Custom he used for the Ahmet Ertegun tribute concert, and they're manufactured here in the UK.

The six-way Free Way switch was recently introduced by the UK's NSF Controls. It means you can add all kinds of options to your guitar without altering its appearance or making the controls too fiddly.

18 ADDING VIBRATO

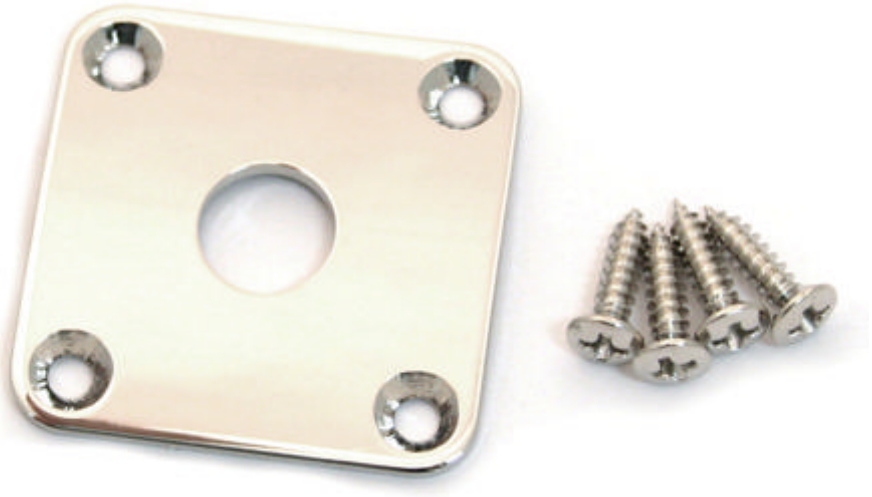
Key to the initial success of Paul Reed Smith has to be his hybridisation of the Les Paul and the Stratocaster, combining traditional Les Paul tones and vibe with Stratocaster ergonomics and a vintage-style trem that actually stayed in tune. The timing was perfect for a generation grown weary of day-glo Superstrats. Fortunately there are now several types of vibrato that can be fitted to Les Pauls without any necessity to drill extra holes or make irreversible alterations. The Schaller 'Tremolo Les Paul' is considerably less intrusive than the Floyd Rose FRX, but the market leader seems to be the Stetsbar Stop Tail.



Let's face it, nobody in their right mind would rout huge holes in the body of a Les Paul to mount a Strat-style vibrato, and Bigsbys aren't for everybody. The Stetsbar has long been the option for players who want to mount a proper whammy bar on a Les Paul.

19 METAL JACK PLATE UPGRADE

If a pickup fails or you break a string, you will be able to keep playing – but if your guitar output fails, you'll find that a Les Paul is not an ideal choice for an 'unplugged' performance. Every guitar design has its weak spots and the jack plate is the Les Paul's because the slim plastic plate is all too easy to snap. The solution is simple – a metal replacement. This is a cheap and reversible modification but try to ensure the screw holes of the new plate will line up with the old one before you hit 'buy it now'. The only tools required are a crosshead screwdriver and something to tighten up the jack nut. If you want to keep the original look, simply install the plastic plate on top of the metal one.



If you wish to buy a metal jack plate, be sure to double-check that the screw holes will line up with those of the original. If in doubt, contact the retailer for more information.

20 MAGNET SWAP

Various types of magnets are used in pickups, and they all sound different. The most common magnetic alloy is Alnico, and P90s and humbucker pickups usually have Alnico II, III, IV or V. Powerful ceramic magnets are also popular with rock players who prefer high output with plenty of brightness. If you want softer vintage tones, extra brightness or higher output and more aggression, it's cheaper to swap magnets than swap pickups. Humbuckers have one magnet and P90s have two, so remove the cover (if necessary), loosen the backplate and slide them out.

Pickup manufacturers may be reluctant to sell you magnets, but suitable alternatives are available from Stewart-MacDonald and Sensmag Inc. Here's a rough-cast A4 magnet being slid into position in a Shed PAF Daddy.

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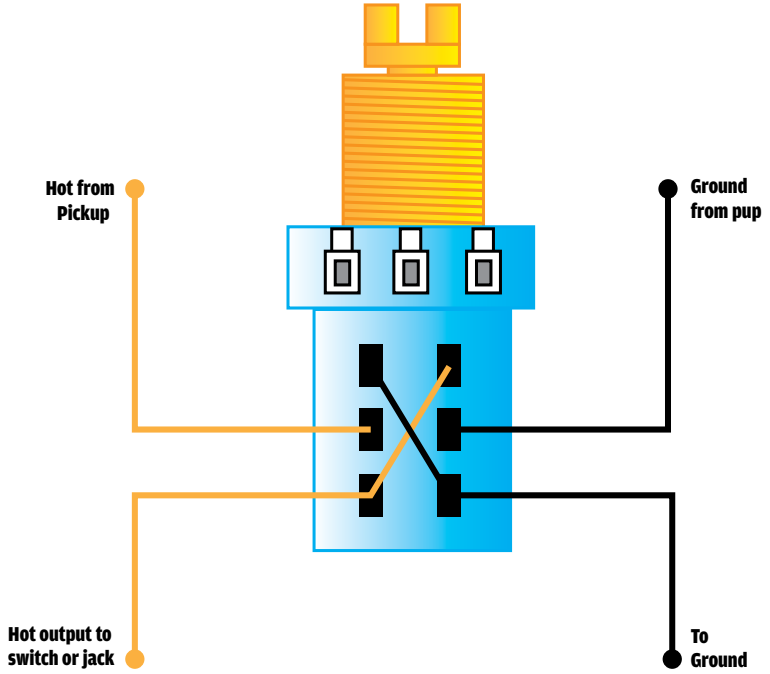
21 SETTING THE PICKUP HEIGHT

Humbuckers have screws at both ends to allow you to adjust the height of the pickups. Similarly, soapbar P90s have two small screws passing through the covers that do the same job. The proximity of pickup coils to the strings has a massive effect. Setting the pickups very high can make them sound overly aggressive and midrangey (the magnetic pull may even reduce sustain). When pickups are set lower the tone can be sweeter and more open, but they can sound dull and unresponsive if set too low. To optimise your tone the only tools you need are a screwdriver and your ears. Take time to experiment before buying a new set of pickups.

Pickup height is a vital ingredient of the fine art of setting up a guitar. Many players don't realise the huge effect it can often have, and go chasing the latest, hippest pickups without first making the most of the ones they've got

22 THE PETER GREEN MOD

During his time with Fleetwood Mac, Peter Green's Les Paul had a very distinctive sound in the middle position because the two pickups were out of phase. There are two ways you can replicate this. After removing the cover of one pickup (we'd suggest the neck), slacken off the baseplate, slide out the magnet then flip it around (not over) to reverse the magnetic polarity relative to the coil. Tighten the base plate up, refit your cover if you use one, and you're done. Alternatively you can flip the phase electronically by reversing the hot and cold connections. This can be hard-wired or switchable.



If you don't want to remove the cover from your pickup, you can reverse its polarity electronically. This can be done permanently or it can be linked to a switch to give you the option

23 REBUILDS

It is widely acknowledged that some of Gibson's current Historic Collection models are the finest guitars they have made since the 1960s but some owners want even more authenticity. A company called Historic Makeovers offers various 'packages' that include nitro refins with aniline dyes, authentic fading, relicing, neck reshaping, top re-carving and celluloid inlay replacement. Optional extras include Brazilian rosewood boards, trussrod replacement, Royalite rebinding, neck re-setting and nylon nut replacement. Prices start from $2015 and customers supply their own guitars. Converting early '50s Les Pauls to late '50s specs has also become popular of late – the premise being that 'the tone' is in the old wood.

Buying a high-end Gibson Les Paul reissue then sending it to Historic Makeovers to have it stripped, dismantled, rebuilt and refinished is not inexpensive, but it's a lot cheaper than a real '50s Les Paul. Here's a specially treated R9.

24 PAF REPLICAS

A desire to recreate the looks and tones of late 1950s models seems to inspire the vast majority of upgrades, and success is largely dependent on the pickups. Unfortunately, PAFs seem to be the hardest pickups to get 'right'. Certain key ingredients are well understood, and these include plain enamel magnet wire, butyrate bobbins, maple spacers and 2.5" magnets. Leaving the coils unpotted is vital too, but the real voodoo part involves getting the tension of the winding exactly correct and knowing how much to offset the coils. There are a handful of manufacturers whose PAF replicas are pretty spot-on, but be warned that the truly authentic tone of PAFs doesn't always conform to expectations.

By and large, replica PAF builders have proved more adept at recreating the look than the tone... but, even so, there are a select few that have managed to nail both. Here's a real '50s PAF with that iconic decal.

25 POT SWAP

The value of volume pots does have an effect on the sound of guitars. As a rule of thumb, lower-value pots equate to reduced treble (Fender use 250K pots to sweeten up their single coils). 500K was always the stock value for volume and tone controls in Gibsons, but many Les Pauls are fitted with 300K volume pots and some have 100K tone pots. If your LP sounds too dull and dark, measure the volume pots and install 500K replacements if 300Ks are fitted. Conversely, 300K pots will help to smooth out over-bright trebles. Some players find the balance they like with a 500K pot for the neck pickup and 300K for the bridge. CTS pots cost around £5 so it's cheap to experiment.

You can buy control pots from suppliers like Allparts UK, but make sure the shafts are long enough for an arch-top Les Paul. Alternatively, check out pre-wired control assemblies from companies like Emerson Custom Guitars.

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A Life in ROCK

With a new supergroup and a Vegas show, not to mention 30 years of Whitesnake, Dio, Lion, and Kiss to talk about, Doug Aldrich is a mine of great rock'n'roll stories. Interview by **Matt Lamy**

'My mate is a studio engineer and he'd asked me a couple of times to play on various famous people's records, but I could never do it because I was busy with Whitesnake,' Doug Aldrich chuckles, beginning another story that seems to amaze the storyteller as much as the listener. 'Then this one day he called and said, can you come in tomorrow morning? I said, yeah, who is it? He said, Lady Gaga. I said, hell yeah, I'll do it.

'So I showed up nine o'clock the next morning and Lady Gaga walks in, dressed to the nines like she's ready to go out on the red carpet. She said to me, look, I just want you to wail, just wail on your guitar. So I did that, they chopped it up and used a couple of squeaks and a couple of chords, and I ended up on the song *Manicure* on *Artpop*. And Lady Gaga was awesome. I got her to initial the back of my Les Paul Goldtop, and then I took a picture of her wearing it.

'The problem came because I'd just signed up for Twitter at that time. I didn't really know how it worked but I put out a tweet saying: "Just done a really cool session with Lady Gaga. Man, she kicks ass". It was very complimentary. But then I started getting texts from her record company saying, take that tweet down, people are going crazy.

'I took my tweet down within 30 seconds of these people calling but by then Lady Gaga's girlfriend had already retweeted it to her 25 million followers. There was no going back. Then the story comes out on MTV news: "Whitesnake and Lady Gaga team up for new record". I felt so bad I'd done something wrong, and I was worried my engineer buddy might get fired. But straightaway, David Coverdale says to me: "Fuck yeah, Doug!" I said, but DC, they only used like two notes. He just said: "Douglas, it doesn't matter – well done, great press."'

First Kiss

Aldrich is just about the most pleasurable interview subject you could hope for – our conversation goes from the scheduled 20 minutes to 30, 40, 50 and then a full hour – and it's not as if he's short on things to do. Last year, after coming off almost 12 years as David Coverdale's chosen songwriting partner and axe-slinger on the good ship Whitesnake, Aldrich went straight into playing with the Raiding The Rock Vault show in Las Vegas. Now he's promoting the debut album from his Revolution Saints supergroup. For someone whose life story at times resembles a rock'n'roll fairytale, it's no surprise to hear the early days were like something from the *Rock Of Ages* musical.

'My parents asked me to go to college – I went for just one day. It felt just like high school, so I got a job at a music store in LA instead. I moved out of home, I soon ran out of money, my phone had been cut off, but I'd put a band together and we were playing on Sunset Strip,' Doug says.

'A girl came up to me and told me Kiss was looking for a guitar player, and she thought they would really like me. I thought she was just joking but then she turned ➔

Gear

Guitars
Gibson Les Paul Doug Aldrich signature model prototype 1, 1990 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop, Fender Telecaster, Danelectro Baritone, Martin D-28 and D-35 acoustics

Amps
1973 Marshall Super Lead, 1979 Marshall JMP

Effects
Wah, Majik Box Doug Aldrich Rocket Fuel overdrive, DVK Goldtop fuzz/vibe

Photo: Jeff Allen/Orion's Eye Photography

Revolution Saints: Deen Castronovo, Aldrich, Jack Blades

up a couple of weeks later at one of our gigs with her boyfriend, who was [Kiss drummer] Eric Carr. This was before people had seen them without their make-up. I was like, is that really the guy? Yeah, he's got the right hair. He came over and said, I'd love you to audition, I think you're really good.

'So Eric called me at the store because I didn't have a home phone, and said, come down to the Record Plant so you can meet Gene [Simmons] and Paul [Stanley]. I walked in and there they were, although different looking without their make-up. They were very nice, they were working on *Creatures Of The Night* at the time, and I started to play some solos against some of the tracks so they could see what I would do.

'Gene wrote down three songs and his phone number, and told me to learn the songs so we could jam at a rehearsal studio down the road. We went to this place – and I was used to using a half-stack at the time – but they had four stacks all wired together just for me. It was awesome. We played these songs and I went away, thinking they were nice, I sounded OK, who knows. Then they called me back and I played with them again. So I came close, but I never joined the band. I was too young, I was still just a kid.'

Dedication

Although he wasn't to be Kiss's new lead guitarist, the experience did have a lasting effect on young Doug. 'It made me feel that I really needed to get serious about this thing. I loved the guitar but I didn't want to be one of these guys that just loves to party and chase chicks and who plays the guitar purely as a reason to do all that. I wanted to be good at it, like my favourite players – Randy Rhoads, Eddie Van Halen, Michael Schenker, Ritchie Blackmore.

'So that was the turning point. I ended up playing in a load of different bands, and missing out on some opportunities trying to be loyal to my mates. But little by little I got smarter. I had some success with Lion and then some sessions, and I jumped around a couple of times from Hurricane and House Of Lords, but eventually I joined with Dio, and that was my break. Not many people knew who I was until Ronnie [James Dio] put me out there.

'Being in Dio was unbelievable. It was great because I came in and I actually got to write a couple of songs on *Killing The Dragon* with him. Ronnie had started to rebuild his popularity with *Magica*, but he'd decided he wanted to make a little more aggressive, rocking record. So that's where I came in. We did that, it got good reviews, and we went on tour with Deep Purple and Scorpions playing to 10,000 or 20,000 people every night.

'Ronnie brought the best out of me, he brought the best out of everybody. You had to be good, but he had a way of encouraging you to be better than you would be otherwise. Interestingly that's how David is too, he brings the best out of the musicians he works with.'

No interview with Aldrich can pass without talking about the man he calls the 'Governor of the Blues', David Coverdale.

'David inspires me greater than anybody,' Doug admits. 'While Ronnie would say, get your ass out there and fucking make it special, David says, well, that was good, but have a listen to this. Then you realise, oh, maybe he likes that kind of thing. He'd push you to rethink what you're doing and you'd come up with something different that was even better than your original idea.

'David knows so much music. He's into Mozart and he's one of those guys who has every concerto, performed by every different orchestra. I'd hear this thing playing and I'd say, that's the one you were listening to the other night. And David would

More Tweets Gone Bad

It's not just Lady Gaga that has been the object of one of Doug Aldrich's unwanted tweets – legendary bluesman BB King has had the dubious honour, too.

'I was in a little jam band called Steamroller,' Doug explains. 'We were touring round Europe, playing covers. We had Joe Travers on drums, and we were getting ready to go on a flight when he said, "Oh my God, BB King's just died". I said, "You're kidding me, no, no! Are you sure?" He said, "Yeah, it's true".

'So just as we were getting on the plane I put out a tweet saying: "The thrill is gone. Rest in peace BB." The plane lands and everyone I know is saying to me, you asshole, he's not dead, he's playing a concert tonight! I felt really bad about that, too. Fortunately, that one didn't go viral...'

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LORENZA CERBINI

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David Coverdale and Doug Aldrich
Photo: Marty Moffatt

Listen up

WHITESNAKE
Forever More
(2011)
Whitesnake's highest charting album in the US since the 1980s, Aldrich believes this was the zenith of his and David Coverdale's songwriting partnership

REVOLUTION SAINTS
Revolution Saints
(2015)
The debut album from Doug's new supergroup features a host of big, melodic choruses, smooth ballads and of course some super-tasteful guitar work

say, "Oh no Douglas, this is played by the Prague Symphony Orchestra in 1908... that one was 1905". He is the Minister of Blues, because he knows everything and everybody. He would explain we don't do this by listening to Led Zeppelin or the Rolling Stones, we do this by listening to the originals. That's what he turned me on to. We had a great run – I'm so proud of what we created together.'

Family first

Aldrich's departure from Whitesnake last year was unsurprisingly devoid of drama or histrionics. Being a daddy to his five-year-old son, newly married, and having reached 50 – although retaining the enthusiasm, excitement and ripped abs of somebody half his age – Doug effectively decided it was time to settle down.

'Family is the one-word answer why I left Whitesnake. I had a couple of things I had agreed to do – one of which was the Revolution Saints record. But I've got my son full-time and I had just remarried. I knew what David wanted and I tried to make it work balancing stuff out, but I just couldn't do it in the end.

'So I respectfully told David that I was going to step away and leave the door open for someone else, and he's got himself a fine new guitar player in Joel Hoekstra. And there's also the capable hands of Reb [Beach]. When it comes down to it, you could put a banjo track down and have David sing over it and it'll sound like Whitesnake. Now I have freedom to do other things, other sessions, because I've been 1,000 per cent Whitesnake for so long.'

Still, Aldrich certainly hasn't been putting his feet up – 'I'm always trying to be busy because my little boy kicks my ass every day!' he laughs – and he went straight into performing *Raiding The Rock Vault*, a Las Vegas extravaganza featuring possibly the world's greatest covers band, playing hits from across the decades. Then he recorded the eponymous debut from Revolution Saints, a supergroup featuring Jack Blades of Damn Yankees and Journey's Deen Castronova.

'The hotel where *Raiding The Rock Vault* initially had its residency was where Elvis had his last seven years in Vegas,' Doug explains. 'They still have a piece of the original stage they've kept intact where Elvis used to stand meditating or smoking, or whatever he did before each performance. But best of all, Elvis also had a secret bar built underneath the stage where he would go down between songs and hang out with Frank Sinatra or whoever was there. So that's where I set up to record my guitars – the majority of the guitars on *Revolution Saints* were done in Elvis's secret bar!'

Ultimate honour

Elvis's spirit might have just rubbed off – the record is a real success, with Aldrich displaying a melodic side to his guitar playing.

'You never know how these things are going to be perceived, but I like the record,' Doug says. 'I love the melodic playing that Jack Blades has, and for Deen it was an opportunity to just shred on the drums. This band is our chance to do something different. For me it was nice to concentrate on really melodic-sounding guitar parts. Originally we thought we'd put the record out and see what happens, but now it's getting really good responses and people are asking if we're going to tour. We'd love to do that.'

> *'Now I have the freedom to do other things. I've been 1000% Whitesnake for so long'*

Doug and Gibson Guitars are currently also working on a signature model. 'That's amazingly exciting for me,' he says. 'We're about halfway through the process with Gibson USA and my goal is to find a new guitar... not replicate something that I've got, but make something better than I've got, and more affordable as well. I'd like to make this so that kids can get a real kick-ass guitar for a price that's not going to kill them or their parents.

'Music has made it possible for me to have fun every day. Even if I wasn't playing, just having great songs from the bands we love gets you through. But I would have never dreamed what's happened to me – it blows me away when I think about it. In this entertainment, music, show-business thing, it comes down to timing and luck as much as talent. I've been very lucky.'

And another thing...

Doug's first-choice acoustic guitar is a Martin D-28 he bought off eBay: 'When it arrived here it looked as if it was covered in tar, and it smelled like an ashtray! Now it's clean, and it's the best-sounding guitar I've got.'

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PLAYING *With Fire*

Scott Holiday of groovy classic rock merchants Rival Sons has an all-consuming passion for the outrageous Gibson Firebird. **Steve Bailey** hears all about it

Californian rockers Rival Sons are currently making lovers of soulful, hard-hitting psychedelic '70s rock very happy indeed. The band have captured that loose, wide-screen, progressive blues rock ethos pioneered by the likes of Free, Led Zeppelin and Blue Cheer with an uncanny authenticity – and, what's more, they've worked a dark spell on it to make it seem thrillingly contemporary, and their fifth album *Great Western Valkyrie* has elevated this Long Beach four-piece to nothing short of 'saviours of rock' status.

The jewel in Rival Sons' crown is guitar man Scott Holiday, of whom some have even been heard to whisper the phrase 'the new Jimmy Page'. Holiday's Firebird-themed arsenal and dedication to searching out glorious tone give him a real edge, and his accession to the throne of the king of the riff is fast becoming a foregone conclusion.

'I thought the Firebird was a bitching, audacious guitar, and hardly anyone was using it'

Holiday formed Rival Sons in 2009, convincing frontman and blues devotee Jay Buchanan to make his first excursion into balls-to-the-wall rock. The debut album, *Before The Fire*, arrived that same year and the die was cast. Four albums on, the band are transcending the retro/classic rock boundaries, and Scott Holiday's inventive guitar work is proving to be one of the most vital components in that progression.

Don't be taken in by Holiday's dandyish three-piece suits and trademark waxed moustache; behind the sharp threads and the shades there's an inquisitive musical mind at work that harbours a deep knowledge of all things guitar. As vintage guitar collector Dave Cobb has been the band's producer from the start, and has been very generous with his valuables, Scott has immersed himself in all forms of classic guitars – yet one particular model has become his calling card. We caught him backstage before a show at the Forum in London to find out just how his conversion to the Gibson Firebird helped set him on his path...

'It was right after we finished our first record, *Before The Fire*,' Scott explains. 'I'd used many beautiful old guitars – SGs, Juniors and Strats, Les Pauls, Teles, Strats and Esquires – just because I could. When we finished the record, I thought "I can't bluff all these sounds with the guitars I have. I'm definitely not getting these tones with just my Strat".

'So I started looking around. I was always a Firebird fan through Johnny Winter, Brian Jones and Keith Richards' non-reverse models, and of course Clapton with his Firebird I. I did the research, learning about Ray Dietrich who designed it, how he had been a car designer... the shape even looks like a big wing of a car, and he came up with the bird logo as well. I was fascinated. I just thought it was a really bitching, audacious, beautiful guitar – and hardly anyone was using it.'

Scouring the web turned up a 1999 pelham blue Custom Historic Firebird, but awkwardly, it resided at Lark Street Music in Teaneck, New Jersey... and Scott was in California, on the opposite side of the US. 'I thought "That's it!" Visually it looked just like how I thought my record sounded. Buzz, the guy who runs the shop, is kind of well-known, and he told me all about this guitar – how the neck was really big and thick, how it played really well. You never know with a Gibson, but I just bought it unplayed. A '60s reverse Firebird in pelham blue must be worth something like $100,000, they're so rare, but this was expensive enough. I sent him a couple of guitars and a handful of money.

'I was elated when it came. I have to fight it a little bit because of the big neck, it almost feels long scale, but I actually love that. I put heavy strings on it and it's a heavy guitar anyways because it's a big chunk of mahogany. I like wrestling around with it. It makes you play differently, attack it and bend it differently. I fell in love with Firebirds after that.' ➔

Gear

Guitars

1999 pelham blue Gibson reverse Firebird, '65 Gibson non-reverse Firebird and '62 Fender Jazzmaster. Three Doug Kaur Banshees: Excalibur finished in white, Ike in Green – both fitted with Powertrons – and a gold-topped model with Chris Klein PAF-style pickups

Amps

Orange OR50 and Thunderverb, Reeves, plus vintage Supro, Marshall, Vox and Silvertone

Effects

Dunlop CAE Wah, Dunlop Volume, Keeley Time Machine Boost, ZVex Fuzz Probe, KR Megavibe, Demeter Tremulator, Line 6 DL4, Strymon Flint reverb/tremolo, EHX POG, Way Huge Ringworm and more

Rival Sons L-R: drummer Mike Miley, singer Jay Buchanan, new bassist Dave Beste, and Scott Holiday

Scott's '65 non-reverse Firebird loaded with PAF-style Tom Shorts

The first Firebird: A 1999 reverse Custom Historic

Offset alternative: Holiday's '62 Jazzmaster

Pedalboard #1: Note mystery 'Zap' fuzz in front row

You're right. I lost!" It had the original P90s in it at the time and they sounded good but it just wasn't going to match up with everything that I was doing, so I put the same Tom Short pickups in it that are in my first Firebird.'

Holiday now had the perfect opportunity to compare Firebirds of both the non-reverse and reverse varieties. 'They're night and day, totally different guitars,' he opines. 'The blue reverse weighs, like, eight pounds and had what were basically humbuckers in it, and it's real meaty and tough. That thing is angry! I can make it sound pretty but it's a real man's guitar, it's heavy and you've really gotta handle it.

'The '65 non-reverse has a really small neck and it's featherweight. The body's really thin. It's still a Firebird and I love the non-reverse shape, so I just ended up loving both of them.'

Back in the day Fender complained that Gibson had violated its patents when the Firebird was launched in 1963 because, they claimed, the body was essentially the shape of a Jazzmaster reversed. This was possibly a factor in why Gibson switched to the non-reverse design in 1965. Holiday considers Jazzmasters to be of a similar breed and his next buy reflected that viewpoint.

'Those offset guitar shapes are the ones I love. The wonkier they are, the cooler they are to me! I decided I was gonna find a really strange Jazzmaster, and I found this beat-up '62 Jazzmaster online at a gypsy jazz site. It just popped up and I was like, look at that thing... it's weird. It looks like it's been refinished in some strange shade of red – it probably started out as dakota red, but it's aged into this maroon-ish colour. It's the last year of the slab board, it had Fender blackface knobs on it, like a Muddy Waters Tele kind of thing, but everything else was original. It was so individual-looking. I could tell that it had all the old mojo and I immediately bid on it.'

Scott received an email the next morning from a bemused purveyor of gypsy jazz guitars explaining that he didn't usually sell electric guitars and had been a little taken aback to find 33 new emails in his inbox

Photos: Mike Prior

On Tour

Rival Sons' British shows have a habit of selling out, so we recommend getting in early. They return for six shows from 28 March to 4 April. There'll be dates in Leeds, Liverpool, Glasgow, London, Nottingham and Southampton. See www.rivalsons.com for more details

The guitar's mini-humbuckers were fine, but Holiday felt they weren't quite what Rival Sons needed. 'I replace the pickups in everything because I'm kooky like that,' he grins. 'I now have a set of handwound pickups in there from Tom Short's Pickup Joint. They're kind of like a vintage PAF. His pickups are insane.'

On the road Scott played his Firebird relentlessly and it featured on the hard-hitting second album, 2011's *Pressure And Time*, despite serious competition from the Dave Cobb guitar vaults. 'I was still pulling a lot of different guitars for recording, everything from Casinos and 335s, Strats, Les Pauls or even Harmony Rockets. Dave kills me with at least one new thing every time.'

Soon, Holiday's web searches also turned up a non-reverse '65 Firebird in a private sale. 'I traded for my '76 Strat for it. I don't know what the guy was thinking,' he marvels. 'I gave him a little bit of money along with it, but it wasn't that great a guitar. I wrote and went "Oh buddy, you lost! This is a really nice guitar. I'm never getting rid of it, ever." He wrote back and went "Shit.

Scott's Stomps: Favourite Sons

'I have a whole NASA space station at my feet,' Holiday laughs when you press him about effects. 'Every album I just keep adding more doo-dads.' The mainstays are his Custom Audio Electronics Dunlop Wah – 'tried and true, man' – and a Dunlop volume pedal: 'I kinda sit on that thing all night getting very touchy with all the amps.' Other faves include a KR Megavibe vibrato/chorus, a Strymon Flint for reverb and tremolo, a Keeley Time Machine boost, a Demeter Tremulator modelled after an old Fender tremolo, and a ZVex Fuzz Probe. 'Zachary is probably one of the great minds of our time as far as pedal builders go. It's unruly and fantastic... I love that pedal.' Other fuzzes include a Basic Audio Gnarly Fuzz and a box simply marked 'Zap'. 'It's a mystery!' Scott laughs. 'I'm not gonna tell what it is... I rehoused it. I use the shit outta that thing. It's a very aggressive type of fuzz. It's great. I like to see if people can work out what it is.'

The big surprise in amongst the array of boutique boxes is a Line 6 DL4. 'I swear by that pedal. I had mine worked on by Keeley so it's cleaner and quieter. It does things that newer pedals still don't do. I use it live, and I use it all over my records too.'

Pedalboard #2 with Line 6 DL4 delay and newest addition, a Strymon Flint

Photo Credit: Warren Orchard

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ELX-382-ADV-EN-JUN14

Scott's main duo of Banshees by builder Doug Kaur: left, his first one, with pin striping and custom Klein PAFS; right, the Excalibur

Kaur Banshee #3 is known as Ike and acts as Scott's backup

Photos: Mike Prior

Dubbed the Excalibur, the result sports a white finish with Gretsch-style sparkly gold binding around the body, neck and headstock. There's gold hardware including a Bigsby and a clear pickguard with the back gold-painted, complete with Firebird logo. All Doug's Banshees are through-necks with traditional wings plus a scarfed head joint to help avoid those infamous neck breaks. 'It has all the nerdy details,' purrs Holiday. 'Doug said "Oh my God, if I do this again I'm gonna charge $10,000!"'

What really makes it a Gretsch crossover is the TV Jones pickups – Powertrons at the neck and middle with a Powertron Plus at the bridge. 'It's a very different sound – not as dark as a humbucker but not as thin as a single coil. Just the right kind of balance, almost like a P90 but you don't get the buzz. Currently these are my best friends.'

The guitar arrived just as the band were going in to record *Great Western Valkyrie,* and Scott was smitten. 'I just never put it down. It ended up being on most of the record.'

Now Scott found himself in the position where he had a whole load of new material with that Powertron sound but no backup for touring. 'Out of necessity I had Doug build what I call Ike. Ike is Cadillac green, it just has two pickups, a Powertron at the neck and Powertron Plus in the bridge, so it's basically mirroring Excalibur but without a middle pickup. It actually has Gretsch control knobs as well!'

Holiday's live backline is an all-Orange affair, with OR50s and Thunderverbs serving him well. He's a fan of boutique Reeves vintage Hiwatt clones, but when it comes to finding the perfect partners for his Firebirds in the studio, the dusty old boxes come out to play.

'We use a small-box Marshall and an old JMP and they sound ripping, it's immediately rock and roll time! There's an old Silvertone 2x12" that's all over *Pressure And Time* and you can hear it on this record, too. There's a '63 or '64 Vox AC30 with the factory Top Boost that was beautiful, but it did what every other old Vox does – it broke. Then there's the old proximity, small amp/big sound idea, so there was a pile of '40s and '50s amps with, like, eight-inch speakers.'

The Dave Cobb amp collection also turned up a tiny little Supro amp that hit the spot perfectly. 'It has one knob, no name badge on it, and the crappiest little cable which catches fire if you leave the amp on too long! I've used it for so many solos with all the 'Birds and I think it sounds so good. You can't go wrong.'

Currently it seems Holiday himself can do no wrong either, and the Firebird has become an almost integral part of his persona. 'I was drawn to them because they make their own little statement,' he admits. 'But that's not what it's about, man. My Firebirds, they sound *good*. Really. I'm not just patting myself on the back, these guitars just sound pretty damn good.'

'The Supro has one knob, no badge, and a cable that catches fire if you leave it on too long'

of offers to buy the Jazzmaster. Fortunately, Holiday got in first. 'I just went "I'll take it". It was reasonably inexpensive, $1600 I think. I didn't even have the money, I just took the credit card, didn't tell the wife, the guitar showed up and I'm like "Look how cool this guitar is!" And she never asked questions!'

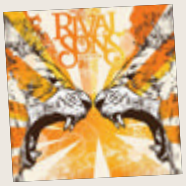
Up until the recording of *Great Western Valkyrie* those three served as Scott's go-to guitars. Then he got a call from builder Doug Kaur who specialises in Firebird and Jazzmaster/Jaguar style guitars. 'Doug said, "I see you're using a Firebird. I want to make you a guitar". He calls them Banshees. I said "Killer. Let's do it". They're amazing, beautifully made, and they only weigh 6.5lbs because they're made of Spanish cedar.'

Holiday liked the guitars so much he bought a Banshee that Doug had already finished in a gold finish with white pin-striping into which he had Chris Klein pickups installed under the original covers. 'I have them wound like a vintage PAF. Chris came into a whole bunch of original '50s Gibson magnets so he made these ones for me. It's a really nice open sound.'

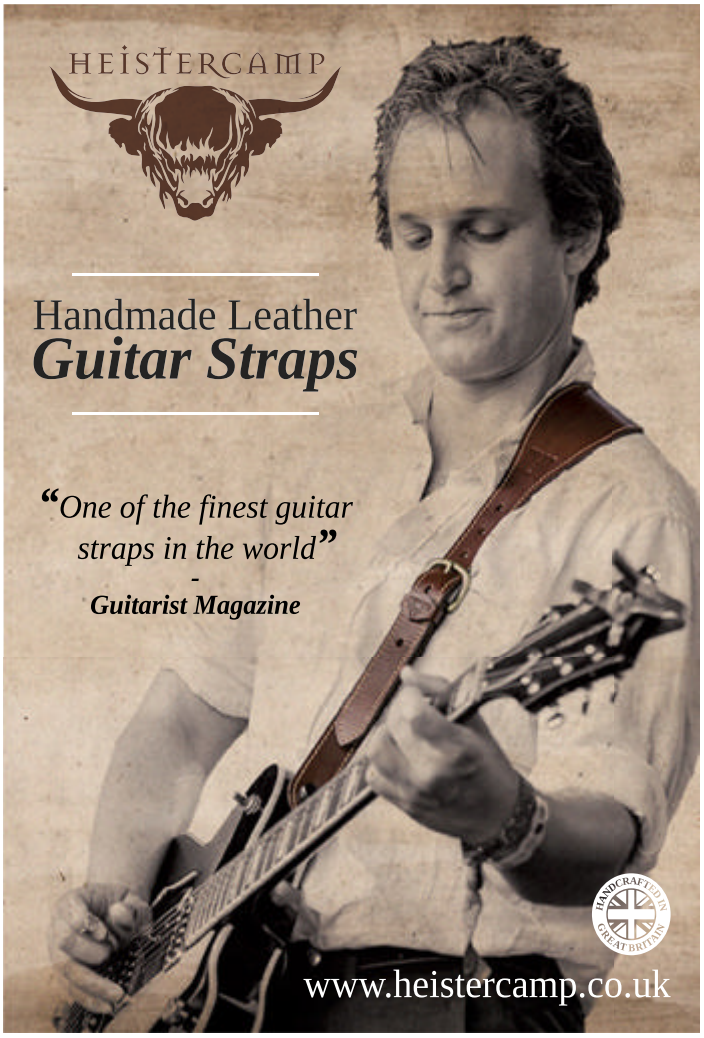
As for the custom build proposed by Doug, Scott had something rather grandiose in mind. 'I'd been playing this Gretsch White Penguin owned by Dave Cobb, and that gave me an idea. Obviously I'm a big Firebird man, but the White Penguin is the coolest-looking thing. I went, Doug... let's do a White Penguin Firebird.'

Listen up

RIVAL SONS
Before The Fire (2009)
Appropriately titled pre-Firebird debut that signalled the arrival of a new blues rock powerhouse with killer riffs to burn



RIVAL SONS
Great Western Valkyrie (2014)
The fifth record in as many years doesn't let up in any way: a spine tingling bombast of pure, inspired rocking



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Hayslom

HAGSTROM
Viking Deluxe Custom

What's the Swedish word for guitar? Well, it's 'gitarr' – but as far as the music world is concerned, it might as well be Hagstrom. **Marcus Leadley** tries out a well-dressed semi-acoustic

This Hagstrom certainly makes a bold statement. The colour of this particular finish is called mandarin, and the rich red/orange glow is very warming indeed. Accented with gold hardware, this Viking Custom Deluxe will definitely get you noticed, and as a 'smart' guitar it would look just dandy worn with a well-made suit on the vintage pop and retro jazz scene. It's a quirky look, too; Hagstrom's vintage credentials are rooted in the late '50s and early '60s, and the company's European design aesthetic manages to be both flamboyant and restrained.

While Hagstrom production first began in 1958 and ceased in 1983, Karl Erik Hagstrom remains very much in the loop and continues to approve new designs in the Select, Vintage and Ultralux series. North American timber is used right across the range of instruments, with American and Korean made parts contributing to the Chinese-based manufacturing process.

Design-wise this Viking has most in common with the company's production model of 1978-'79. The defining aspect is the use of a solid maple centre block that runs the full length of the body. Mid-'70s Vikings like the 1 N had the same 'lily' design headstock badge and humbucker pickups, but only a smaller support block under the bridge. Models prior to this had a six-in-line headstock (like the so-called 'Elvis model' he

Flamed maple and cream binding all round

Quirky headstock and stair-step tuner buttons

A Viking Custom Deluxe would look just dandy worn with a well-made suit on the vintage pop and retro jazz scene

played during the '68 Comeback Special) and single coil pickups. The use of the full-length centre block aligns the Viking with the Gibson 335. Dividing the body chamber in this fashion is principally a feedback-busting trick to enable a semi-acoustic to function effectively at high volume, making them ideal for electric blues and a serious alternative to a solidbody for rock gigs.

Laminates are generally used in semi-acoustic construction, and this is the case here. The addition of a flame maple top is a stylish twist' and the slightly chubby design of the f-holes adds a unique Hagstrom touch.

One major point of departure from previous Viking designs is a move from bolt-on to a set neck. Again, this aligns the design with the 335 and one cannot help but feel this instrument is being set up as a less expensive contender for the potential Gibson buyer's cash.

This Viking Custom Deluxe balances well on the knee or a strap. The big (but not too big) body makes it a great ➔

FACTFILE
HAGSTROM VIKING CUSTOM DELUXE

DESCRIPTION **Semi-acoustic electric guitar made in China using North American timber, American and Korean parts**
PRICE **£775, price does not include hard case**

BUILD **Semi-acoustic body constructed from maple laminates with solid maple centre block. Canadian hard rock maple set neck with 22 fret Resinator (wood composite) fingerboard. Long Travel tunomatic bridge with Hagstrom Trapeze Tailpiece. Hagstrom 18:1 diecast tuners**
ELECTRICS **Two Hagstrom HJ-50 humbucking pickups, independent volume and tone controls and three-way pickup selector**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Mandarin, black cherry**

SCALE LENGTH
628mm/24.47"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 43mm
12th fret 53.2mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 21mm
12th fret 23mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 35mm
Bridge 52.5mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 1.8mm
12th fret bass 2.2mm
WEIGHT **3.5kg/7.75lbs**

CONTACT **Rosetti**
01376 550033
www.rosetti.co.uk

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Epiphone
Dot
Nicely-priced instrument based on the Gibson classic 335. Maple laminates and centre block, humbucking pickups and available in natural, sunburst or cherry
RRP **£299**

Gibson
ES-335
The original in all its majesty. Humbucker pickups and a choice of sunburst or classic cherry finishes; 2015 edition has block markers and Burstbuckers
RRP **£2090**

Gretsch
Electromatic Centre-Block (RED)
Double cutaway thinline guitar with a pair of Filter'Tron humbuckers. Very funky – and red – and designed in collaboration with Mr Bono of a popular combo called U2
RRP **£800**

Gold-plated HJ-50 humbuckers and transparent pickguard

guitar to cuddle on the couch, and the pleasingly loud and twangy acoustic response suggests it would be an ideal late night instrument for a bit of unplugged fun.

All Hagstroms, and this Viking is no exception, feature a Resinator fretboard. This wood composite is designed not only to emulate the look and feel of ebony but also to be super-hardwearing and to deliver a very consistent feel. If I didn't know this and simply played the guitar, I don't believe I'd think it was anything other that ebony; the feel has the right smooth, low friction appeal, and the colour match is spot on... there even appears to be a grain structure.

The board is nicely bound and well fretted, and in combination with the slick Canadian rock maple neck it feels great to play. The neck is slightly less deep than the equivalent Gibson 60s slim taper; it's narrower at the nut but, surprisingly, wider at the 12th fret, so it feels wider and flatter. However, the 24.75" scale length ensures a familiar tension under the fingers that promotes easy string bending. Upper octave access all the way up to the final 22 fret is really very good. The vintage-style 18:1 diecast tuners look good and the stepped keys feel nice under the fingers. The Long Travel tunomatic bridge is a fairly familiar-looking unit which combines well visually with the slightly quirky Hagstrom trapeze tailpiece.

The Korean-designed Hagstrom HJ-50 humbuckers are relatively new units, though the covers with the black 'H' insert and screw polepieces looks like a design straight from the same era as the Gretsch Filter'Tron. Looking through the lower f-hole it's good to see that full -size pots and quality hookup wire have been used. The electrics offer a standard feature set: independent tone and volume controls and a three-way toggle pickup selector, which is sensibly located well out of harm's way of the upper forward bout.

Sounds

Both pickups are very well voiced for clear, clean and twangy tones. The bridge pickup is bright without being brash and the full spectrum response is nice and even. There's a slight bump in the mids, but the bass end is smooth and mellow. The twang factor is very good for rockabilly and country playing, and vintage Beatles and Stones tunes sound authentic.

The twin pickup setting offers a ringing hi-fi tone that's ideal for contemporary jazz and melody work and the neck unit delivers a similar, but rounder tone – a great all-purpose rhythm voice. The tone controls on a semi can really help you on the way to a range of mellow solo and jazz voices. Unfortunately the Viking's aren't the most flexible, as they have little effect until the last third of their travel. This all-or-nothing characteristic is usually an issue with lower-priced guitars and should really be addressed; it's an easy fix with the right capacitor.

When it comes to rock, the Viking Custom Deluxe is full of surprises. The pickups are relatively hot and require very little amp gain to bring on a sweet, edgy sound for electric blues. To be honest, it's more a question of holding this guitar back; it really wants to leap forward into full on hard rock territory. Anyone who loves massive power chords and wailing leads will appreciate the power. It's hard not to compare this Hagstrom's sound with Gibson or Gretsch voices, but it comes off very favourably. In terms of a unique tone I particularly like the twin pickup drive tone with the neck pickup's tone control wound right off; you get a kind of underpinning lo-fi swampiness with clarity in the mids and bright top end. It sounds awesome with analogue delay, and totally evil when you stamp on a fuzz pedal.

Verdict

The Viking Custom Deluxe mixes quality materials and parts with a slightly quirky vintage look, and the result is a great guitar that's fun to play and very versatile. If the mandarin/gold hardware combination is a bit opulent for your tastes there are other Viking models to consider, but it all rather suits an instrument that functions well in both Gibson and Gretsch territory – and the price is certainly right if you fancy the big-stage semi-acoustic sound but don't have £2000-£3000 to invest.

Lavish binding, Hagstrom logo and fleur-de-lys inlay

Harp-shaped tailpiece and Gretsch-type control knobs

FINAL SCORE

HAGSTROM VIKING CUSTOM DELUXE	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**17**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Looks	**17**/20
TOTAL	**88%**

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VINTAGE
V100MU Midge Ure Signature Model

Ultravox's mighty Midge Ure played in Thin Lizzy for about seven and a half minutes, y'know, so this hard-rocking, whammy-equipped Vintage signature guitar is entirely right and proper. Review by **Marcus Leadley**

Midge (that's Jim backwards, apparently) Ure has had a fascinating career. While many of us will associate him with the art-house pop of Visage and Ultravox plus the fact that he co-wrote and produced the second biggest-selling UK single of all time, his brief time with Thin Lizzy substantiates some proper rock guitar credentials. He's still a very active songwriter, solo and band performer, and his love affair with Vintage guitars has been ongoing since 2010. Since then, the V100 and the Lemon Drop have been his two main stage guitars, and the sounds he pulls out of them make a compelling augment for taking Vintage guitars seriously.

This signature model is essentially a modified V100GT Gold Top but with an added Gibson-style vibrola. Though it features the same PW90SK pickups that are fitted the V100GT, here they are connected to a master tone control and a Vari-coil rotary control rather than a pair of independent tone controls. The PW90SKs themselves are stacked soapbar-style pickups that offer the hum-cancelling properties of a humbucker but with a bit more single-coil type bite, and the Vari-coil allows you to 'dial' the second coil in or out, so you can manipulate the sound to a much greater degree.

Individual tuners with plastic keystone buttons

Offset heel eases access to the upper fingerboard

First impressions are very favourable. The Les Paul-inspired design is a classic and the Gold Top finish with cream pickup covers is a look that echoes the style of the early/mid 1950s. As well as a subtle redesign for the headstock there are a couple of significant shifts away from the old formula.

The upper shoulder curves in towards the neck rather in the manner of the old Aria PE guitars, while the neck joint has what designer Trevor Wilkinson refers to as an 'offset heel', intended to facilitate better upper octave access. It's an elegant solution.

While the vibrola looks at home, this unit was really designed to fit flat-top solid guitars like the SG, and its use here requires a significant rout behind the bridge which extends pretty much to the tail of the guitar. You'd never know it, but the body is also very slightly oversized so that the distance between the vibrola and the bridge can be correct without creating an overhang at the tail end. Clever stuff!

Wilkinson has paired the vibrola with a GBR Roller Bridge and the tuning is very stable. The body is built from mahogany with a carved maple ➔

FACTFILE
VINTAGE V100MU

DESCRIPTION **Solidbody electric guitar. Made in China**
PRICE **£409**

BUILD **Chambered mahogany body with separate maple cap, set mahogany neck with rosewood 22-fret fingerboard. Wilkinson GBR Roller Bridge bridge and vibrola, Wilkinson Deluxe WJ44, E-Z-Lok tuners**
ELECTRICS **Two Wilkinson PW90SK stacked soapbar pickups, independent volume controls, master tone, Vari-coil and three-way pickup selector**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Gold top only**

SCALE LENGTH
628mm/24.47"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 43.2mm
12th fret 53.6mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 21.2mm
12th fret 23.2mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 35mm
Bridge 50.5mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 1.7mm
12th fret bass 2mm
WEIGHT **4kg/9lb**

CONTACT **JHS**
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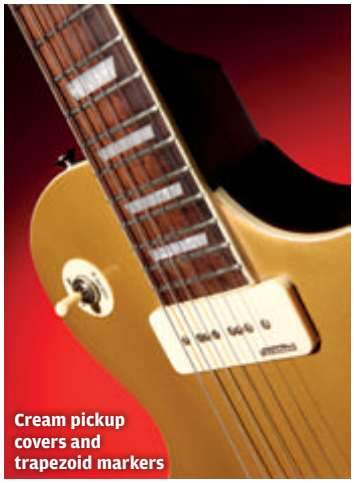
Epiphone
1956 Les Paul Goldtop
No vibrola, admittedly, but all the right P90 sounds, decent hardware and a heap of vintage appeal
RRP **£379**

PRS
SE 245 Soapbar
Again, no vibrola, but this flat-topped single-cut has soapbars and is very solidly made. Also, no gold: it's black or sunburst only
RRP **£545**

Gibson
N-225
This rarely-spotted Gibson is a small, spiky semi-hollowbody with vibrola tailpiece, a bridge humbucker and a neck P90. Who else on your block will have one? Nobody
RRP **£772**


Cream pickup covers and trapezoid markers

Vibrola vibrato works on the simplest principles

Bound rosewood fingerboard and regular 24.75" scale

The pickups have stacked coils plus alnico and ceramic magnets to attain a balance between output and character

cap subsequently glued on: classic LP stuff. While the exact structure of the body could only be revealed by destructive methods, removing the rear control covers reveals significant cavities in both upper and lower bouts, so there is a degree of chambering; the body certainly rings beautifully and the sustain is very good. The neck is also made from mahogany and, as is the case with most Vintage instruments, the headstock is scarf-jointed on below the third fret. This means they use less wood (and save money) but it doesn't affect the performance and arguably produces a stronger neck that's very unlikely to warp. The bound rosewood fingerboard look and feels very nice and the fretting and finishing are in line with the generally high standard that the Chinese factory delivers for instruments in the Vintage Reissued series.

Vibrola is neatly sunk into the top of the body to ensure the correct break angle

Sounds

The traditional P90 pickup still remains popular for its sweet, singing but raucous tone. These Wilkinson PW90SKs are the same Platinum Series pickups used for high-end Fret-King guitars; though clearly based on the familiar P90 theme, they develop the concept further via the stacked coils and also by containing both an alnico and a ceramic magnet to attain a certain balance between output and character.

The basic single-coil clean tone is well-articulated across all three settings. The bridge pickup delivers a bright but sweet tone that sounds great for melody playing and '60s style shimmery pop. The twin pickup setting is tonally more complex, which makes a good starting point for experimentation, and the neck pickup has a rounded low-end response, which makes it especially good for accompanying vocals and for general rhythm work.

You can add a little of the second coil to any of these tones to warm the sound up and smoothen the bright side. Going all the way to humbucker mode works well both with the twin pickup option and the neck unit, especially if you want jazzier tones. The bridge pickup humbucker tone is a little too squeezed in the midrange for my taste, but this comes into its own when you ramp up the gain, as it really starts to wail. The range of lead voices you can create is quite something; the combination of the Vari-coil and the tone control provides a multitude of shades and different dynamics. The Vari-coil can also be used live to nuance your sound on the fly, and this can be very expressive and creative.

Verdict

Does the addition of the Vari-coil and the vibrola justify the upcharge of £110 above the basic price of a Vintage V100 Gold Top? Yes, we believe it does, not only for the classy looks but also because the Midge Ure model's tweaks do offer some real sonic advantages. Thanks to its clever housing the vibrola works surprisingly well on this style of guitar, and the bridge design is such that you have too get quite aggressive before you need to retune. The artist branding is limited to a simple signature on the truss rod cover, so whether you're a Midge fan or not is pretty much irrelevant; the main thing is that while this is a relatively low-cost instrument, you can be confident that a pro musician, who could pretty well play anything, walks on stage with the very same guitar. It's the quintessence of a genuine celebrity endorsement... and what could be better than a great sound at a fair price?

FINAL SCORE

VINTAGE V100MU	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Vibe	**18**/20
TOTAL	**90%**

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BluesCube

ROLAND
Blues Cube Artist

From the cream tolex right down to the writing on the badge, Roland's Blues Cube echoes vintage amps from a certain other brand – but it sets about its work in a way that's entirely modern. Review by **Will Nicholas**

Blues guitar – for good or bad – can be something of a traditionalist's world, and in the past, amplifiers noted as the finest for the genre have most often contained numerous glowing bottles that burn the fingers of the unwary. Roland's new Blues Cube promises 'genuine tube sound and response with modern reliability and easy portability'. It's certainly portable at 16kg/35lbs, but the the Blues Cube doesn't contain any valves at all. Instead, it uses 'Tube Logic' – a technology based on digital signal processing which the company says is more advanced than regular digital modelling.

Before we look at the Blues Cube in detail, there's one more thing to mention: as we go to press, Roland has just announced a collaboration with the infamously discerning tone hound Eric Johnson. Apparently Roland's Tube Logic very much sparked his interest, and this has resulted in an upcoming EJ Tone Capsule. Based on the sounds of Johnson's favourite Marshall and Fender amps, it's basically a modification unit that plugs in under the chassis to change the Blues Cube's circuit characteristics to Mr Johnson's tastes. Unfortunately, the new EJ module wasn't available for us to sample at the time of this review.

The Blues Cube accepts the Roland GA-FC controller, which retails at £95

The Blues Cube Artist uses Tube Logic, a system which Roland says is more advanced than regular digital modelling

Back to the core amp. Tube Logic, says Roland, attempts to reproduce 'the inner workings of the revered tweed-era tube amp in every way, from guitar input to speaker output'. In other words the Blues Cube is all about '50s Fender amp tones from clean to the grungy and all points in between. Roland has focused on preamp and power amp distortion characteristics as well as power supply compression (aka 'sag'). They have restricted the onboard effects to reverb and tremolo; if you want more, you can use stompboxes or connect line level effects in the FX loop.

Chickenhead knobs may be obligatory for tweediness, but Roland gear always gets black knobs with metal tops; there is just one mini-chickenhead at one ➔

FACTFILE
ROLAND BLUES CUBE ARTIST

DESCRIPTION **Twin channel 80W-0.5W solid state combo with 12" speaker**
PRICE **£689**

CONTROLS **Volume with Boost & Tone switches (Clean channel), Gain and Volume with Boost & Tone switches (Crunch channel), Bass, Middle, Treble, Presence, Tremolo with Tap switch, Reverb, Master (volume) and four-way power switch**

REAR PANEL **Jack sockets for tremolo, channel select, optional GA-FC foot controller; USB Rec Out; phones, line out sockets; FX loop send and return**
DIMENSIONS **592mm wide, 260mm deep, 485mm high**
WEIGHT **16kg/35.2lbs**

CONTACT **Roland UK 01792 702701 www.roland.co.uk**

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Line 6
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Retro-styled 25W combo with one 12AX7 and two EL84 valves, Celestion G12 H90, Line 6 HD modelling, , Class AB 25W/'fixed' bias or Class A/10W/cathode bias. Four voicings: California Clean, Crunchy British, Chimey British, Higher Gain
RRP **£587**

Fender
Blues Deluxe Reissue
If DSP is a legitimate alternative to valves, it follows that valves are a legitimate alternative to DSP. So here's a tweed-covered 40W Fender combo with a 12" Eminence speaker, 2 channels, reverb and effects loop. Price includes footswitch
RRP **£579**

Line 6
DT50 112
Switchable 50W/25W combo with two channels, two 12AX7 and two EL34 power valves, 4, 8 and 16 Ohm speaker outputs, a Celestion G12 H90, adjustable cathode or 'fixed' bias voicing, HD Modeling with configurable analogue circuit (negative feedback loop, Class A/ Class AB, pentode/triode switching). Reducible output, MIDI in, FX loop with Level control, DI out
RRP **£377**

Cleverly combinable channels, plus simple reverb and tremolo

end, and it switches power from 80W to 45W, 15W and 0.5W.

Designated Clean and Crunch, both channels feed into a master volume. The Clean channel has a single Volume control but Crunch has Gain and Volume. The channels share Bass, Middle, Treble and Presence controls but there are individual Boost and Tone switches. Of course there's a Channel Select switch, but the Dual Tone switch is the big thing. It allows both channels to be used simultaneously – as you might combine clean and overdriven amps when recording. Tremolo and Reverb knobs control the intensity of the effects and there's a Tap switch to set the speed of the tremolo along with an EXP loop switch for the FX loop.

Around the back are sockets for the FX loop, line output and phones, plus jacks for tremolo, loop and channel footswitching plus a jack for the optional GA-FC Foot Controller, which covers all switching requirements in a single unit. Lastly a USB socket enables the user to connect to a PC for direct recording with speaker simulation on a variety of recording platforms.

All this is housed in an open-backed poplar cabinet with blonde tolex, metal corners, an attractive grille cloth and a moulded plastic handle. Inside there's a 'custom tuned' 12" speaker with a retro label reading Roland V-12 80.

Sounds

Set the Blues Cube to 80W then crank up Master, and the Clean channel has plenty of headroom, but to hear what the DSP is all about means setting the Master and/or the Power control lower and exploring the effect of the Volume. As it's raised, you hear a throaty overdrive starting to creep in; at first just a hint of warmth and girth, but this transforms into a touchy-feely sag which allows the Blues Cube to respond to playing touch much like a real tweed amp. For low-power tweed amp tones combining rolled-back Treble and Presence with boosted Middle is the recipe, but you can reverse that to emulate Fender's more powerful and sophisticated late '50s amps. The Tone switch adds extra treble, which we found a bit too edgy with Treble and Presence set high, but it works very nicely to add a hint of sparkle on top of the fat mids of the 'low power' settings. Although nicely touch-sensitive, the Blues Cube doesn't quite respond to your guitar volume like the 'real thing'. Rather than cleaning up quickly, overdrive is retained until about halfway down, though with a noticeable reduction in bass and low mids.

The Blues Cube even goes beyond tweed and into Blackface territory. This is particularly apparent when turning the midrange down and dialing in the reverb. With its ability to go from boxy '50s grunt to late '50s big box grind and '60s-style country twang and surf, the clean channel gets our thumbs up for versatility and tone.

At equal levels, the starting point for the Crunch channel corresponds to the Clean channel with its volume control set about halfway up; overdrive is starting to fill out the sound, but Crunch's core tone is a bit lighter in the bass and low mids and there's a little more treble. Turn Gain up a couple of notches and the low end fills out as the Crunch channel comes to life. We're not sure which amp this channel was based on, but at high gain levels it's tweed at meltdown. Although there are plenty of old-school overdrive tones, the Blues Cube pushes the envelope to encompass 1970s metal and modern rock sounds.

The EQ controls have plenty of influence, especially the Middle setting, which swings from scooped US tones to a more full-throated UK vibe. Essentially, it's very easy to dial in a range of classic and modern drive tones.

The Dual Tone feature is the Blues Cube's ace in the hole. Like many high-gain amps, the Blues Cube can sound compressed and slightly murky when heavily overdriven, but fading in the Clean channel introduces extra clarity and attack without detracting from crunch or sustain. It also fattens and focuses the low end.

Coming at it from the other direction, adding a soupçon of overdrive to clean tones makes the Roland Blues Cube more touch-friendly and increases sustain without adding obvious distortion (you can even hear that 'bloom' where notes hang on and the harmonics shift). As a specialised tweed modelling amp, the Blues Cube comes closest in Dual Tone mode.

Verdict

This amp is both loud and lightweight, and even without the yet-to-be-released EJ Tone Capsule it sounds very nice – and thanks to power scaling, a wide range of overdrives and the Dual Tone facility, it's so versatile that players should be able to dial in sounds they can enjoy at almost any volume.

A single 12" speaker handles the Blues Cube's considerable volume capabilities well

Output scaling is switchable in four stages from 80W to 0.5W

FINAL SCORE

ROLAND BLUES CUBE ARTIST	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Versatility	**18**/20
Sound	**17**/20
Value for money	**15**/20
Vibe	**17**/20
TOTAL	**85%**

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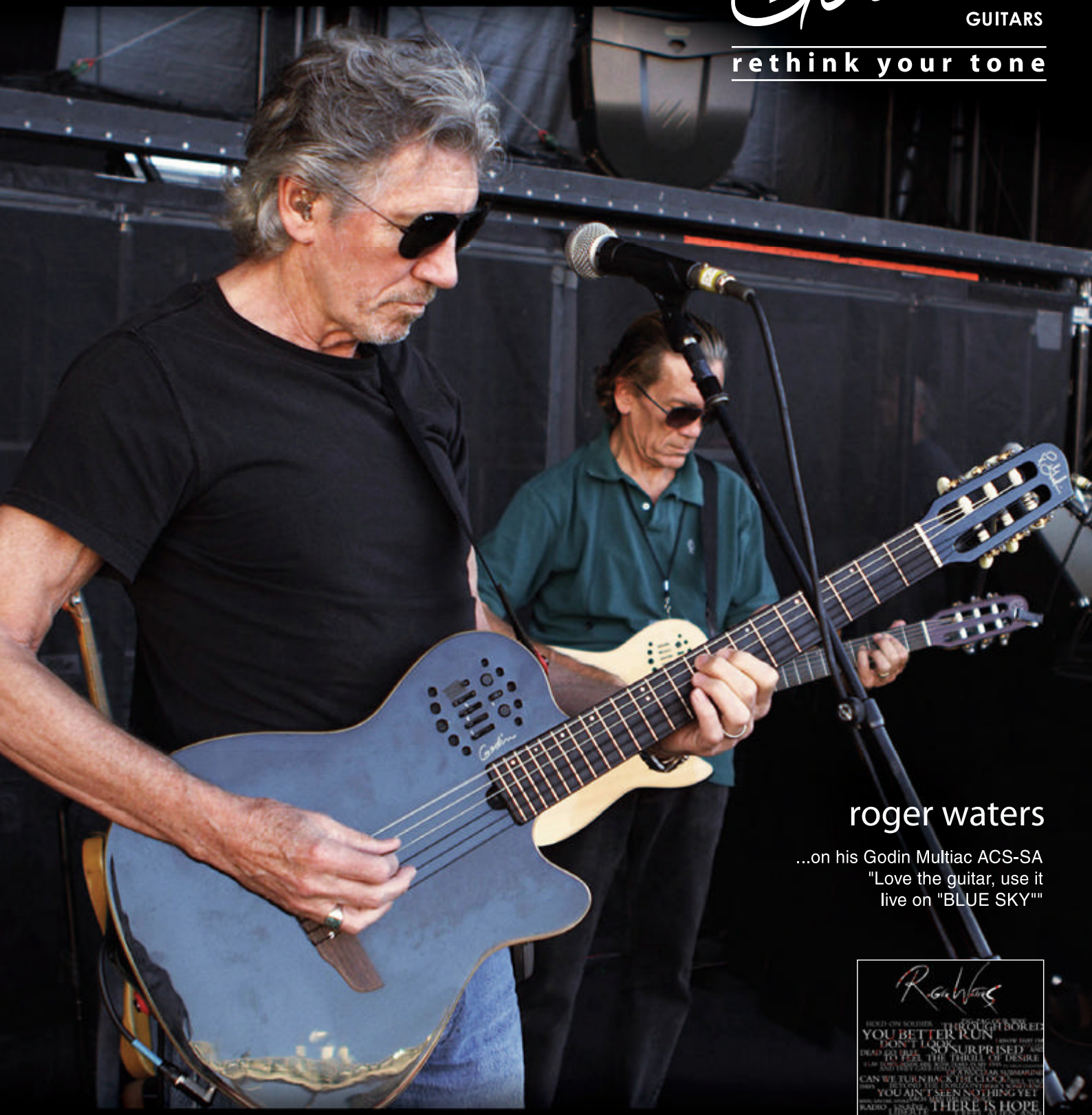

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ORANGE
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Crush 35RT & Crush 20RT combos

New for 2015, these revamped Crush practice combos come with simple reverb, plus a tuner... and filth aplenty. Review by **Richard Purvis**

For many Orange amps, both ancient and modern, the name 'Crush' would be painfully appropriate – it's exactly what they'd do to every bone in your foot if you were ever reckless enough to drop one... and the floorboards beneath would probably be left with some heavy bruising, too. In this case, though, you might just get away with it: the Orange Crushes are juicy-toned practice combos, as reasonable in weight as they are in price.

The range has been around for a while but these RT models are new for 2015, replacing the old Crush PiX models, and the main difference seems to be that most of the digital FX have been chucked away. What we're left with are the only ones that most players will need: reverb and the oh-so-handy tuner. We're guessing that's what the R and T stand for.

Crush 35RT

One day Orange will make an amplifier in the shape of a giant silver mackerel, with the controls hidden in its left gill. While we're waiting for that (it might be a while), we can expect lots more amps that look exactly like this: the same satsuma-coloured vinyl, the same chunky frame, the same black-on-white control panel and the same stiff basketweave grille cloth with that zany badge in the middle. Have you ever actually looked at the Orange logo close-up? The chap on the left appears to be holding a teatowel and wearing a balaclava made of marmalade. No doubt it all makes perfect sense to someone... or else it did back in the late '60s. Anyway, the Crush 35RT is a fairly simple solid-state combo with a single 10" speaker and switchable clean and dirty channels. There's an input for a footswitch on the back, but don't expect to find a free one in the box at this price. It's no heavier than you'd expect from its compact dimensions, and is made mostly of fibreboard with tough

↦

Nice clear controls, though Ch2's Dirty and Gain knobs are separated by the EQ knobs

The Orange RT amps replace the old Crush PiX models, with the digital FX replaced by a simple reverb and a tuner

FACTFILE
CRUSH 35RT

DESCRIPTION **Two-channel 35W 1x10" solid state combo. Made in China**
PRICE **£199**

TOP PANEL **Headphones out, aux in; Clean/Dirty channel switch; Dirty volume, Treble, Middle, Bass, Dirty gain, Clean volume; guitar input; Reverb level, Tuner LEDs and on/off button**
REAR PANEL **Power on/off; jack sockets for channel footswitch (not included) and FX loop send and return**
DIMENSIONS **44cm wide, 40cm high, 23cm deep**
WEIGHT **11.4kg/25lbs**

CONTACT **Orange Amps**
020 8905 2828
www.orangeamps.com

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Blackstar
ID:Core Stereo 40
Ultra-portable 40W practice combo with useful stereo effects and speaker-emulated line out for recording
RRP **£159**

Yamaha
THR10X
The rock-minded version of Yamaha's handbag-like stereo practice and recording amp comes in a moody moss green
RRP **£299**

ZT
Lunchbox
The speaker measures only 6.5" but this 200W mini-amp is giggably loud. You can't actually put your lunch in it, though
RRP **£299**

FX loop send and return plus a socket for the extra-cost channel footswitch

The dirty channel goes from crunch to a tasty British rock grind to metally stuff as filthy as anybody could want

black corner protectors and a top panel that's safely recessed below the plastic carrying handle. The cab is pretty well put together, and as with many Oranges it's not easy to get into, even just to check out the speaker: the back board is held on by four screws but it still takes some prising out after you've removed them. The chassis itself seems to be held in place by black magic of some kind – we'll leave it inside the cabinet.

There's nothing so tricky about the controls, though they could perhaps have been arranged in an order more intuitive to players rather than engineers: the dirty channel's Volume is at one end but its Gain knob is next to clean Volume at the other, separated by a three-way EQ section that's shared by both channels. Running across the top of the whole lot is a little strip with those dear old Orange graphics; then there's a mini toggle switch for flicking between the two channels if you don't have a footswitch, plus an auxiliary input for playing along to records and a headphone output for doing so without fear of embarrassment.

Below all that is the stripped-down FX section: a single control for the level of the digital reverb (there's no bypass switch – just turn it to zero) and a strip of LEDs for the tuner. This does have an on/off switch, which is just as well as the poor thing would go mad trying to keep up with any performance involving more than one note at a time.

Sounds

We've had some stonking great Orange amps come through these doors in recent years but clearly, with 35 solid-state watts coming through a single 10" speaker, we're not expecting this wee thing to tear holes in our underpants. Yet in fact, even on the clean channel with Volume no higher than 11 o'clock, the Crush 35RT has a nice bit of a kick. It is a totally pure and undistorted sound, perhaps more so than you'll ever get with a valve amp, and judged against 'serious' Oranges you might call it dry and plasticky; but genuine cleans are what many people will want from a practice combo like this.

It keeps getting louder all the way up the dial, and does start to crunch up close to full blast, or earlier depending on the output of your pickups. Hard-strummed chords on a Telecaster in the bridge position ring out with surprising richness, and there's plenty of tone-tweaking capability in those three EQ controls – although even with Bass on full you're not going to feel the full hurricane-force whoomph of a 4x12. Could this amp keep up with the rhythm section in a full band practice? Maybe not quite, but it'll have a go.

We still have the other channel to unleash – and Orange amps have always been happiest playing in the dirt. It starts meekly enough: keep Gain down at nine o'clock and the amp stays clean even with the Volume maxed out. At around 10 o'clock you'll run into the same sort of crunch found at the top end of the clean channel; any higher than that and you might need to start turning down a bit. Gain at noon brings full-on British grind, and some players will want to knock off a slice of Treble at this point to save their ears from the stinging attack, particularly with single-coils. It's a tasty rock sound, with plenty of impact and no cheap fizziness – although you will get some of that if you turn the Volume down too low.

The top half of the Gain dial is where the real metally stuff happens. It gets as filthy as anyone could possibly want it to, and that dinky speaker copes as well with the roaring low end as it does with the screaming top. You can even scoop out the midrange and push the Treble and Bass for a more modern, less British voicing – although this might leave the clean channel sounding pretty harsh when you switch back.

In most contexts the digital reverb is best taken in small doses. It's fairly dark and dense, and if you're playing overdriven chords it will do nothing more than duck your tone into a bath of murk unless you keep the level barely on at all. But for clean single-note playing of the surfy (or indeed Shadows-y) kind, you can get away with as much of it as you like. It's just a pity there isn't a footswitching option.

That just leaves the tuner, which has two excellent virtues: it's dead simple, and it can instantly give you any note on the scale, making it ideal for obscure open tunings and, for ↦

FINAL SCORE

CRUSH 35RT	
Build Quality	**17**/20
Versatility	**17**/20
Sound	**17**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Vibe	**18**/20
TOTAL	**87%**

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FACTFILE
CRUSH 20RT

DESCRIPTION **Two-channel 20W 1x8" solid state combo. Made in China**
PRICE **£159**

TOP PANEL **Headphones out, aux in; Clean/Dirty channel switch; Dirty volume, Treble, Middle, Bass, Dirty gain, Clean volume; guitar input; Reverb level, Tuner LEDs and on/off button**
REAR PANEL **Power on/off; jack socket for channel footswitch (not included)**
DIMENSIONS **36.5cm wide, 32cm high, 19.5cm deep**
WEIGHT **6.8kg/15lbs**

CONTACT **Orange Amps 020 8905 2828 www.orangeamps.com**

example, dropping down to C# for heavily distorted ungodliness. Play any open string and the line of LEDs on the left will tell you which note you're closest to, while the three lights on the right will guide you to the in-tune zone. How precise is that zone? Maybe not terribly, terribly precise. How precise do you want the tuner on a practice amp to be? Maybe not terribly, terribly precise. In other words, it's perfect. You may find that you hit the green light with suspicious ease, but play a chord afterwards and all six strings will be near as dammit. And when you bear in mind that many of the players buying an amp in this price range will be plugging in budget guitars with slightly flaky machineheads... well, you really wouldn't want it any different.

Finally, we should mention those two sockets at the left end of the panel. The auxiliary input works fine as long as you're happy to control the level of the music at its source, but it does come out of the amp's speaker – which is a guitar speaker, after all – sounding somewhat rough and clanky. You'll have better results using the headphone output... although here, conversely, it's the guitar sound that suffers a little, tending towards sterility in a way we've heard many times before in amps with headphone outputs. It'll do, though.

Crush 20RT

Well, this is awkward. We'd normally have about 300 words here on the unique features of the Crush 20RT, but right now I can only think of nine words: It looks exactly like the other one but smaller. And that really is it. Even the control panel is identical, though it's been squeezed at the edges to make it fit into a space that's about an inch shorter. Oh, and if you look round the back you'll notice this one doesn't have an FX loop.

The price differential is minimal – just £40 – but there are some people for whom the 20W model will be a better choice all round. Specifically, small people. It's much lighter. The lower output rating and 8" speaker mean it's not going to blast out quite so much dragon breath, naturally, but in some bedrooms that can only be a good thing.

Sounds

The basic voice of the 20-watter is largely similar to its big brother, for obvious reasons. It certainly is less loud and less full in the bottom end, but less headroom can mean more friskiness at housemate-friendly levels, and that's the case here. In some ways the lighter tone of the 20RT is actually more likeable, and the difference is perhaps more pronounced on the dirty channel, where the very British bark of the 35RT's midrange makes way for something a little more subdued – in part, no doubt, because of the smaller speaker. Other than that, everything is just as it was with the other amp a few paragraphs ago.

Verdict

If you know a young guitarist (or would-be guitarist) who got some money for Christmas and has somehow managed to not spend it yet, here's a good place to begin the search for a home amp. Well, two good places – because while the Crush 35RT is clearly the big brother, it would be wrong to think of the 20W version as nothing more than a 'junior' option for those who can't rustle up the last 40 quid. As a practice combo for players of all ages and levels of skill, it may even prove to be the more practical choice because of its ultra-portable build. Mind, offered a choice, we'd take the bigger amp any day because it's so much more potent. You've got to scare the neighbours a bit sometimes, haven't you?

Control panel is a fraction smaller; otherwise, everything's the same

No FX loop on the 20RT

FINAL SCORE

CRUSH 20RT	
Build Quality	**17**/20
Versatility	**16**/20
Sound	**17**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Vibe	**18**/20
TOTAL	**86%**

POCKET-SIZED
GIANTS
loop level
DITTO
LOOPER
true bypass
tc electronic
(Actual size)
VORTEX
CORONA
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REVERB
HOF
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FLASHBACK
SPARK
polytune 2
tcelectronic.com/pocket-sized-giants
tc electronic

CHECK
DRIVE
INPUT
SD-1w
CHECK
S C
LEVEL
INPUT
OUTPUT
Blues Driver
BD-2w
BOSS
技 WAZA CRAFT

BOSS

Waza Craft SD-1W Super Overdrive & BD-2W Blues Driver

Waza Craft, the posh end of the Boss stompbox line, takes on two of the best-known overdrives in the world. Review by **Richard Purvis**

There was once a thing called the 1980s, and some of us learned to play the guitar in this mystical, near-forgotten kingdom. We stumbled along the stony road to competence with very badly made guitars and terrible solid-state amps... and as for pedals? Well, we dreamed of Boss but generally had to make do with flimsy imitations. It was a nice place in some ways but, dear God, please don't make us go back there.

There aren't many things that are still as they were in the '80s. So how about Boss? The stompboxes certainly look exactly the same as they did back then, and they seem to be every bit as popular among guitarists of all kinds, but they're occupying a slightly different slot in the marketplace. When you can easily pay £200 or more for a boutique overdrive, today's RRP of £45 for the trusty old SD-1 Super Overdrive seems like a street urchin's loose change. Not bad considering three decades of inflation – and the fact that, at least since manufacturing moved from Japan to Taiwan some time around 1990, nobody seems to have complained much about any perceived drop in quality.

There has been some fresh thinking at Boss HQ, however – and these Waza Craft units are two of the latest products to come out of it. Yes, they do look very much like just another SD-1 and a BD-2 Blues Driver; but there are a couple of clues on the front of each pedal, and one more right at the top of this page. £135 is precisely three times the RRP of a standard SD-1, and almost twice that of a non-Waza BD-2 (£75). So what makes them so special, apart from a 'W' in the name and a bit of Japanese script on the black stompy area?

The answer to that question lies in the pedals' innards, which, we're told have been revised for 'premium sound' using 100 per cent discrete circuitry rather than op amps – that is, separate components instead of IC chips. Now, there's nothing wrong with chips, as long as they're part of a balanced diet, and in fact some of them are highly prized by tonehounds: the JRC4558, for example, is often cited as a crucial ingredient of the classic Ibanez Tube Screamer sound... and there's a version of it at the heart of the SD-1. But Boss has decided there's no place for such shortcuts in the Waza Craft range.

The other difference is the little slider switch squeezed into the middle of each unit's control panel: the initials stand for Standard and Custom. Standard is essentially a refined version of the original pedal's sound, while Custom promises something new. But don't get too excited, because we've been warned not to expect two pedals in one here – just a slightly different flavour with more fullness and sustain.

FACTFILE

SD-1W SUPER OVERDRIVE

DESCRIPTION **Overdrive pedal. Made in Taiwan**
PRICE **£135**
CONTROLS **Level, Tone, Drive; Standard/Custom switch**

CONTACT **Roland UK**
01792 702701
www.roland.co.uk

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Overdrive Preamp 250
Very yellow Digitech-made reissue of an American classic with just two controls, Gain and Level
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Rodenberg
Gas-808 Overdrive
Hand-made in Germany, a sweet-toned OD with switchable bass boost
RRP **£199**

Keeley
Boss SD-1 Mod
An SD-1 with its circuitry modified to make it 'fatter, cleaner and more defined'
RRP **$139**

FACTFILE

BD-2W BLUES DRIVER

DESCRIPTION **Overdrive pedal. Made in Taiwan**
PRICE **£135**
CONTROLS **Level, Tone, Gain; Standard/Custom switch**

CONTACT **Roland UK**
01792 702701
www.roland.co.uk

Like this? Try this...

Seymour Duncan
805 Overdrive
Impressively tasteful OD with a dinky (but fiddly) three-band EQ section
RRP **£159**

Lazy J
Cruiser
Jesse Hoff's wondrously smooth overdrive was designed with blues players in mind
RRP **£240**

AnalogMan
Boss BD-2/Super
A modded Blues Driver promising creamier tones and no shrillness
RRP **$145**

That fiddly switch is the main complaint

SD-1W Super Overdrive

Let's start with the basics that you'd expect from any Boss compact pedal, Waza or no Waza: it's a sturdy little metal box with a grippy rubber base, metal in/out sockets and a 9V adapter input at the top end. The knobs sit safely below the level of the giant footswitch, which doubles as a battery cover thanks to a screw at the front that's easily 'unlocked' with a gentle squeeze on the spring-loaded switch. It's a very clever piece of design – no wonder it hasn't changed in over three decades.

It does have one limitation, though. Because that switch takes up almost two thirds of the surface of the unit, there's not an awful lot of room left for the controls. It isn't a problem with just Level and Drive plus the slightly skinnier Tone dial, but there's only a half-inch gap for the Waza version's new Standard/Custom mode switch. It's too tight – you cannot access it without touching the other controls, unless you have tweezers for fingers. Surely side-mounting it would have made more sense. Still, there is plenty of resistance in all the knobs so you're unlikely to mangle your settings by accident.

Now wouldn't it be handy if we could pull out a standard SD-1 for comparison at this point? Alas, my pedal cupboard says no... but it turns out there are advantages to being married after all, because 'er indoors has one: a somewhat scuffed and dusty but still fully operational '90s sample. The two really are close to identical on the outside, but the differences are more apparent once the baseplates (and the protective sheets of clear plastic behind them) have been removed. The SD-1W's main board has a more angular layout, with smaller components, and ribbon cable strips have replaced much of the spaghetti-like wiring of the basic unit. More importantly, a search for the telltale squat black rectangle confirms that the Waza circuit is indeed chip-free.

Sounds

Like the Tube Screamer, the Boss SD-1 is not renowned for luscious bottom end. It's a mids-focused overdrive, designed to cut through a mix and leave the lower frequencies to the bassist. The SD-1W is no different: engage the pedal with Drive low and the other two controls at noon, and chords are noticeably thinned out. It's a pretty traditional rock sound, throaty but not too harsh.

Side by side with the standard SD-1, it feels just a little more full and pure, with less wiriness in the high notes. It's an improvement, but not a dramatic one. The gain range is moderate – you can crank Drive to full without being dragged into psycho country – but it's aggressive enough for screaming solos and menacing power chords.

So now we poke a delicate pinkie into that tiny gap and switch to Custom mode. Yes, it's clearly the same pedal, but the overdrive is now distinctly smoother, with more body and sustain. There's still a midrange hump and a drop in the bottom end, but it's less pronounced – and the more you push the Drive, the more obvious the difference becomes. In short, this is the DS-1 grown up. It seems that, after years of seeing other companies clogging up the internet with mods and DIY kits to make pedals like the DS-1 sound less scratchy, Boss has decided to stop sulking and join the game.

FINAL SCORE	
SD-1W SUPER OVERDRIVE	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Versatility	**18**/20
Sound	**17**/20
Value for money	**15**/20
Looks	**17**/20
TOTAL	**85%**

BD-2W Blues Driver

The Blues Driver is a drive pedal for blues. Incisive, eh? Of course, it doesn't have to be limited to blues: it's for anyone who wants tasteful levels of gain without the thinning effect of a Super Overdrive. Our Waza Craft version is exactly like the SD-1W, with the same Standard/Custom switch in the same little gap, but Drive is now called Gain.

Sounds

This time there's no drop in bass, and the overdrive is smoother all round. Any blues-minded stompbox should sound nice at low gain settings, acting as a booster for an amp that's waiting to be pushed into overdrive, and the BD-2W handles that task like a pelican handles fishing. It still sounds surprisingly amp-like when you let the pedal do all the work, and there's no loss of fatness with the dirty stuff cranked.

Some players find the BD-2 too spiky, and this problem has not been entirely cured by the new circuit – if you're using single-coil pickups and a bright USA amp, you might struggle – but it can be controlled to an extent with the Tone knob. Turn it down to 10 o'clock and a Les Paul will retain its clicky attack but not at the expense of needles jabbing at your eardrums with every pluck.

Engaging the Custom mode has the same effect as it does on the yellow pedal: more warmth, more silkiness. It's enough of a difference that you'll be glad it's there, but it doesn't completely undermine the Standard setting – in some situations you're likely to prefer the lighter, more open-toned option, so it is a real bonus to have both.

Verdict

These are pedals for Boss lovers – if you're not a fan of the non-Waza versions, they're unlikely to convert you. But they're interesting new takes on familiar voices, adding just enough boutique-style sophistication to make the three-figure price tags realistic. And, of course, like all of Boss's classic compact stompers, they're simple to use and solidly built, with a footswitch that you just can't miss.

FINAL SCORE	
BD-2W BLUES DRIVER	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Versatility	**18**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Looks	**17**/20
TOTAL	**87%**

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From The Black Country, United Kingdom

LAKEWOOD
Koa M56 Custom

Lakewood started out making bespoke instruments, and a guitar like this all-koa M56 Custom shows just what a fine job they can do with a special customer order. Review by **Huw Price**

Lakewood may be a fairly mainstream guitar brand these days, but a visit to the company website will reveal how streamlined the process for ordering a custom Lakewood has become, as there's a 'virtual designer tool' which allows you to choose the exact specifications for each and every component of your guitar from an extensive drop-down menu. It's an exhaustive list that encompasses tone woods, neck profile, nut width, inlays, binding and purfling, tuners and far more besides.

You could easily while away a few evenings designing your dream guitar. Some features come as standard while others are subject to an upcharge, but the designer tool keeps a running cost total for you, so it's easy to stick within budget. Once you have made a decision on all your specs, you simply print off a PDF document and send it to your dealer to begin the ordering process. Waiting times vary, but can be less than three months.

Koa wood is the overriding theme of this Grand Concert-shaped cutaway model, and we'd be hard pressed to say whether the front or back is the more spectacular. The back and sides have an open pore satin finish, with gloss preferred for the front.

Stunning koa back – including binding and heel cap

Mahogany neck and koa-buttoned Schaller tuners

Koa wood is the theme, and we'd be hard pressed to say whether the back or the front is the more spectacular

Every available edge has been bound with koa – including the ebony bridge, which is a very unusual touch. There's also wood purfling and two slim bands of abalone for the rosette, and even the buttons of the gold Schaller tuners are koa. The one-piece mahogany neck inevitably pales in comparison, but the peghead has a lovely ebony overlay to complement the un-marked fingerboard. Lakewood offers two pickup options, the LR Baggs Element and the Anthem; this M56 was supplied with the Anthem system – an Element undersaddle piezo pickup plus a Tru-Mic condenser mic mounted 3mm off the bridge plate. A control panel just inside the soundhole provides Blend and Volume controls along with a phase switch and battery indicator. ➔

FACTFILE
Lakewood Koa M56 Custom

DESCRIPTION **Cutaway grand concert sized electro acoustic. Made in Germany**
PRICE **£3500 with hard case**

BUILD **AAAA solid koa top with solid koa back and sides, mahogany neck, ebony fingerboard, koa bindings and wood purfling, abalone rosette, round D neck profile, Schaller M6 tuners with koa buttons, LR Baggs Anthem pickup system**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes, at £130 extra**
FINISH **Open pore satin back and sides, gloss top**

SCALE LENGTH
650mm/25.6"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 46mm
12th fret 57mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 20mm
Ninth fret 23mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 38.5mm
Bridge 58mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2.5mm
12th fret bass 3mm
WEIGHT **2.1kg/4.62lbs**

CONTACT **Go To Guitars**
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www.gotoguitars.com
www.lakewood-guitars.co.uk

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An all-koa, all-gloss grand auditorium with a cutaway, ebony fingerboard and bridge, mahogany neck and Expression pickup system
RRP **£3107**

Collings
0002H
This 12-fret slothead is styled after the pre-war all-koa Martins that were developed in response to the craze for Hawaiian music. Ebony board and bridge with open gear Waverly tuners
RRP **£5799**

Santa Cruz
00 Koa Custom
A slightly smaller pre-war style slothead with 24.75" scale length, ivoroid binding, nitrocellulose finish, scalloped bracing and Waverly tuners
RRP **£5699**

Bound headstock with ebony overlay

Double pearloid soundhole rosette

Volume and piezo/mic blend controls

The M56 has a gorgeously sweet sparkle and shimmer that's devoid of brashness and a refined, balanced quality

Sound

Although all-koa acoustics are rare, I have had the opportunity to review such instruments in the past. One in particular, a Collings Concert 0002HKK, was unforgettable. Although the Collings is a hard act to follow, I started this Lakewood M56 Custom review with high hopes and I wasn't disappointed.

When a guitar differs so significantly from the usual formula, it has to be assessed on its own terms. There's not much point in wondering why it doesn't sound like a similarly-proportioned spruce or cedar-topped instrument. We can only describe the tone to the best of our abilities so you can figure out whether it would suit your playing needs and taste.

All-mahogany guitars have seen a recent upturn in popularity. Besides the colour, the only common feature between all-mahogany and all-koa guitars is reduced volume and punch compared to spruce-topped guitars. Where the mahogany will typically give a dry and woody tone with prominent mids and a rolled-off high frequency response, the M56 has a gorgeously sweet sparkle and shimmer that is totally devoid of brashness. There's a refined quality with even string-to-string balance and a low end that's solid but not too dominant. One listener suggested it would record very easily because it almost sounds like studio quality compression and equalisation has already been applied to rectify boominess, bring up the midrange detail and add some treble gloss.

The M56 sounds drier and less lively than equivalent guitars with rosewood back and sides, but it's more harmonically complex than a typical all-mahogany instrument and also far more 'sophisticated' than our 000 sized mahogany/spruce reference guitar.

When you first spend time with an unfamiliar but inspiring acoustic, the tone and playing feel of the guitar itself will often steer you towards the style of playing that suits it best. Although fun to strum, the M56's charms really emerged through fingerpicking.

For palm-muted styles, the M56 produces a nice degree of thump and the harmonic overtones provide intriguing sonics without obscuring close note clusters. It's excellent for bluesy and ragtime as well as Celtic stylings with drones, dropped tunings and mash-ups of open strings and fretted notes. Some heavier strings may help to bolster the bass in dropped D and C tunings, and we'd be inclined to experiment because this guitar is great for laid-back slide playing.

Since the pickup system is an optional extra, customers can opt for either of the LR Baggs systems Lakewood offers or have their preferred system fitted post-purchase. So we won't dwell on that aspect beyond stating that the combination of the Tru-Mic and Element undersaddle pickup certainly does the M56 justice. The tone is natural, realistic and feedback resistant, but a bit of treble attenuation may be required through some amps or PA systems.

Koa-bound ebony bridge and matching bridgepins

Verdict

Generally speaking this Lakewood's build quality is top-drawer, but those inclined to search out such things may notice two small imperfections. For instance, the top of the bone nut is polished to a high gloss, but the back is left rough, with visible file marks. Viewed front on, the gloss top looks fantastic, but from a player's perspective it's obvious how the finish sinks into the grain. This is a consequence of Lakewood's policy of keeping the finish as thin as possible to optimise tone, which is fair enough. Obviously these are minor details that have no bearing on playability or tone, and the M56 Custom is an unusually beautiful instrument in every respect, and we're reluctant to send it back.

FINAL SCORE

LAKEWOOD KOA M56 CUSTOM	
Build Quality	**19**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Looks	**20**/20
TOTAL	**93%**

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FRESHMAN
Maple Ridge guitars

Freshman's sturdy Maple Ridge series offers a selection of dreadnoughts and OMs, plus extra choice when it comes to cutaways, finishes and pickup systems. Review by **Huw Price**

First of all, we should clear up something that may cause confusion. Freshman once had a series named 'Cedar Creek', but the tops of some of those guitars were actually made of spruce. Similarly, not all of the guitars in Freshman's Maple Ridge series are actually made from maple – some are, but not the two we are reviewing this month.

According to the manufacturer, the Maple Ridge collection was 'designed to accommodate a smaller budget without sacrificing any of the quality that Freshman is renowned for'. The shapes and sizes may be different, but this month's pair actually have quite a lot on common.

Both have solid spruce tops combined with laminated mahogany backs and sides – in fact, the entire Maple Ridge series has recently improved with A-grade spruce tops. The fingerboards, bridges and peghead overlays are rosewood and the necks of both guitars have the same chunky 'C' profile. Bone is the standard material for nuts and saddles, too.

Although assembled and finished in China, every Freshman guitar goes through quality control at Access All Area's HQ in Scotland, where they also receive a final setup before being dispatched for sale. So let's examine the finer details of each model more closely.

Scarfed-on headstock with sealed gold-plated machineheads

Dark-stained back and sides and black binding

The FA1DSBS dreadnought has a gloss finish and a shaded sunburst top with dark edges fading to an orangey amber

FA1DSBS

Of the two, this dreadnought is by far and away the most eye-catching. As if the shaded sunburst top wasn't enough, the whole guitar is finished in gloss and polished to a deep lustre, and the closed-back diecast tuners are gold-plated. It's a pretty decent sunburst too, following the Martin shadetop pattern, but with very dark edges graduating to a deep orangey amber in the centre.

The top is made from an attractive piece of spruce with narrow and fairly straight grain lines. The inside surfaces of the sides look like mahogany but the back looks more like maple and the outer laminates are hard to discern under the heavy brown tint of the ➔

FACTFILE
FA1DSBS

DESCRIPTION **Dreadnought acoustic. Made in China**
PRICE **£199.95**

BUILD **Solid sitka spruce top, laminated mahogany back and sides, black binding, 20-fret set mahogany neck, rosewood fingerboard and bridge, bone saddle, bone nut, gold plated diecast tuners**
ELECTRICS **None**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes**
FINISHES **Sunburst, natural**

SCALE LENGTH
646mm/25.5"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 43mm
12th fret 54mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 21mm
12th fret 23mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 35mm
Bridge 54.5mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2mm
12th fret bass 2.5mm
WEIGHT **2.1kg/4.6lbs**

CONTACT **Access All Areas**
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www.freshmanguitars.net

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VGS
RT-10 Root AS
European-made sunburst dreadnought with solid spruce top and laminated mahogany body and sides
RRP **£157**

Gretsch
G5024E Rancher
Sunburst dread with solid spruce top and laminated mahogany back/sides, rosewood board with neo-classic inlays, Fishman Isys+ pickup system
RRP **£306**

Rosewood bridge with compensated bone saddle

With a pleasant sound, this Freshman dreadnought acquits itself well as a general-purpose strummer and picker

finish. It's a similar story with the neck, but the wood's grain is consistent with mahogany and it's just about possible to see the tell-tale lines of the stacked heel and scarf-jointed headstock.

Black binding along the fingerboard and around the headstock provides a bit of luxury while also disguising the fret ends. The front and back body edges are also black-bound, but this time with contrasting white pin striping. The FA1DSBS does feel solidly made and has a straightforward practicality that inspires confidence.

Fine-grained solid sitka top is a bonus on a guitar of this price

Sounds

Tuning up is an easy process thanks to the smooth tuners, and the FA1DSBS held its tuning well throughout our tests. The sound couldn't be described as especially loud for a dreadnought, but it's certainly loud enough. Similarly, the bass isn't the deepest or the boomiest we have ever heard from a dreadnought, but that's no bad thing because the low strings integrate well with the midrange and treble and there's not too much mid-scoop.

The plain strings 'ching' nicely over the top without being harsh or excessively bright. This makes the FA1DSBS easy to fingerpick and the response of the bass strings is tight and controlled enough to handle dropped tunings without flubbing out.

Overall the FA1DSBS acquits itself well as a general-purpose strumming and picking guitar. It has a pleasant if fairly generic dreadnought sound that is more useable than memorable, but certainly above average considering this guitar's retail price.

FINAL SCORE

FRESHMAN MAPLE RIDGE FA1DSBS	
Build Quality	**15** /20
Playability	**17** /20
Sound	**15** /20
Value for money	**17** /20
Looks	**18** /20
TOTAL	**82%**

FA1AN

We have no concerns about the finish quality of the FA1AN. Satin finishes do tend to be more forgiving than gloss but even so, there's a crispness and precision about the detailing this model that is slightly ahead of the dreadnought. It measures 38cm across the lower bout, with the maximum depth of the body being 10cm.

The spruce grain is a bit wider, and the back and sides look like mahogany both inside and out. We see the same neck profile and construction as before, but this time there's an extra band of white on the headstock binding and the rosette has a tortoiseshell look rather than abalam. The tuners are identical apart from being chrome-plated.

The significant differences are the body shape and the cutaway, but there's also the Fishman Isys 301 pickup system with a control panel loaded near the waist on the bass side. The system carries the Freshman logo and is made for Freshman to the company's specs.

The control panel incorporates a digital tuner with a battery status light. There's also a volume knob, but tone control is restricted to a single Contour switch. Although the system is fairly basic, there is a phase switch to further shape the sound and minimise feedback. Power comes from an easily accessible 9v battery mounted on the lower bout right next to the jack socket.

Sounds

The FA1AN has the same hand-filling, proper acoustic neck profile as the FA1DSBS and it's a similarly easy playing guitar. However, we think it's also a nicer and more fulfilling instrument because the tone has that bit more character and sonic interest.

This 'character' takes the form of a prominent, woody and slightly boxy midrange. In a sense it's not dissimilar to a parlour-type tone, but with deeper bass and more volume, and this led us towards picking out blues numbers and indulging in some Travis picking rather than going off in a folky direction.

It's maybe not as loud as the dreadnought but the FA1AN is a decent rhythm guitar with an even response

↦

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FACTFILE
FA1AN

DESCRIPTION **OM-sized acoustic guitar with cutaway. Made in China**
PRICE **£299.95**

BUILD **Solid sitka spruce top, laminated mahogany back and sides, black binding, 20-fret set mahogany neck, rosewood fingerboard and bridge, compensated bone saddle, bone nut, chrome-plated diecast tuners**
ELECTRICS **Fishman Isys 301**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes**
FINISH **Natural, white, black, wine red**

SCALE LENGTH
650mm/25.6"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 43mm
12th fret 54mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 20mm
12th fret 23mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 35mm
Bridge 54.5mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2mm
12th fret bass 3mm
WEIGHT **2kg/4.4lbs**

Like this? Try this...

Hudson
HF-STXE MKII
Electro-acoustic cutaway guitar with solid spruce top, laminated mahogany back and sides, mahogany neck, ebony fingerboard and a satin finish. Factory fitted with the Fishman Ion+ preamp and pickup system
RRP **£295**

Harley Benton
Custom Line CLA-16SCE
From the Vintage Solid Series, this electro-acoustic has a cutaway 000-sized body with a solid sitka spruce top, laminated mahogany back and sides, rosewood fingerboard, black binding, compensated bone saddle and bone nut, scalloped X-bracing, diecast tuners and a Fishman Isys + pickup system
RRP **£144**

Simple controls: volume, contour, phase reverse – and a tuner

The FA1AN sounds engaging and has a classiness to its finish – and the Fishman pickup system is hard to fault

across the strings. It's easy to make out the individual notes within chords, although a slightly rolled-off treble response makes the overall timbre woody rather than chiming.

Plugged in, the FA1AN is even more enjoyable. Even in the absence of bass and treble controls the system does a fine job of capturing the FA1AN's natural tone. The contour control is subtle but effective, scooping the midrange very slightly. This effectively de-emphasises the FA1AN's tendency towards boxiness and allows it to come over with a more familiar frequency balance and a bit more chime in the upper frequencies.

Fortunately this extra chime is not accompanied by the harshness that is all too common with undersaddle piezos – particularly those fitted to entry-level guitars. The output level is adequate, but we were obliged to crank the input gain of preamps reasonably high to achieve an optimum signal level. Even so, we were able to achieve reasonably high volume levels without any feedback issues, and found the phase control served more as a tone shaper than a feedback controller.

Verdict

With £100 between them these two guitars are not that far apart in price and they share the same specs of solid spruce top and laminated mahogany back and sides. That being said, their sound and response is quite different – and they also feel very different from a player's perspective. The gloss finish does make the FA1DSBS feel like it is coated in plastic to some extent, whereas the FA1AN's satin finish doesn't present the same perceived 'barrier' in feel between the hand and the neck.

The sub-£300 price is a very crowded section of the acoustic guitar market. The FA1DSBS has a solid feel that inspires confidence and an enjoyable tone, but there's nothing about it that we would describe as exactly outstanding. Even so, it's a very decent guitar for the money. If we had to choose between the two, though, the FA1AN would be the one to go for. As well as sounding more engaging, there's a classiness about the finish that the FA1DSBS doesn't quite manage to match, and the pickup system is hard to fault. Prospective purchasers may also be interested to know that the Maple Ridge series comes with a lifetime warranty for the original owners.

Lighter stain on this model, plus chrome tuners

Coachlined binding and a ready-installed strap button

FINAL SCORE

FRESHMAN MAPLE RIDGE FA1AN	
Build Quality	**17**/20
Playability	**17**/20
Sound	**17**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Looks	**17**/20
TOTAL	**84%**

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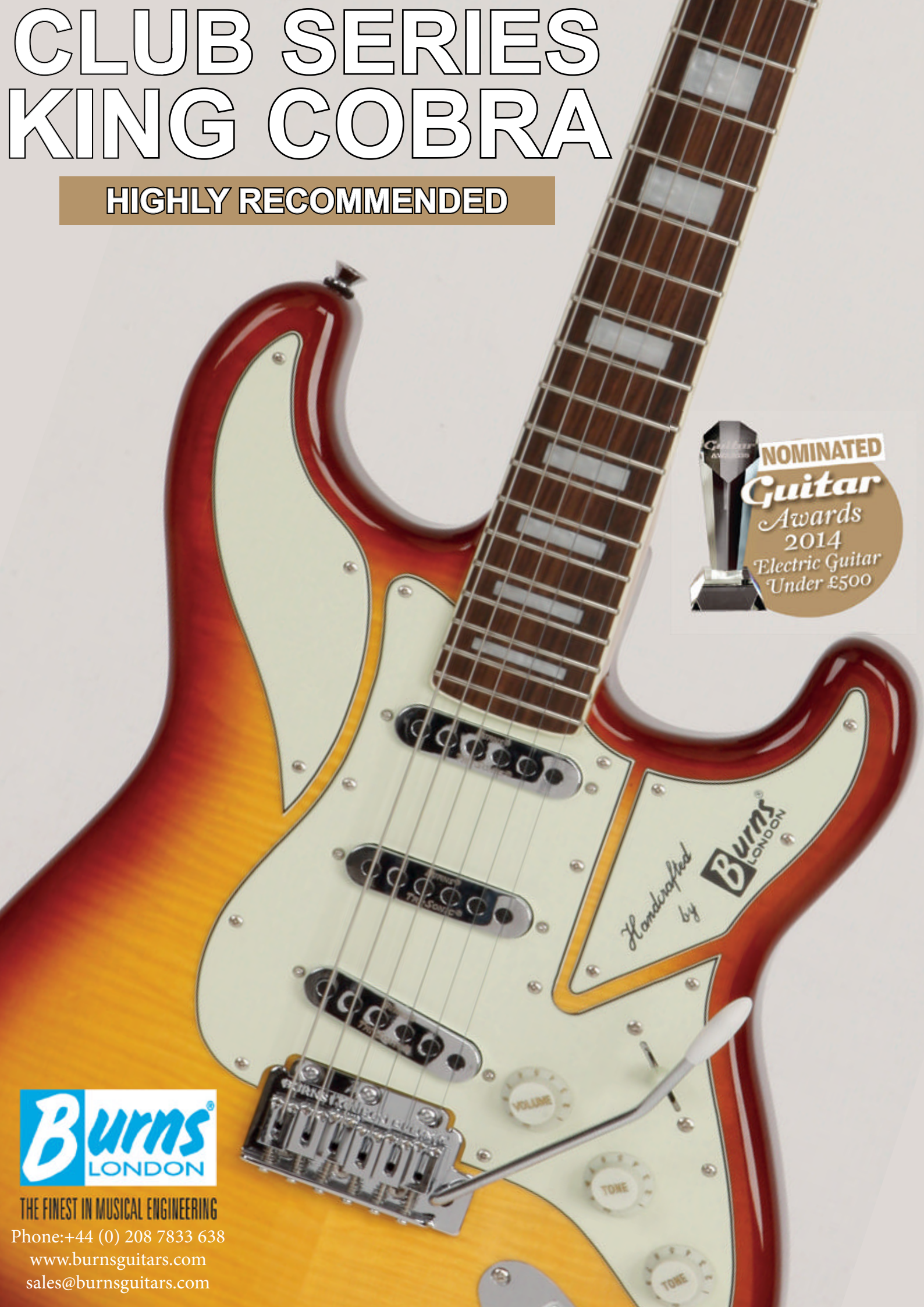

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ROSCOE

Century Standard Plus 4JM 4-string Bass

Roscoe's Century Standard is tasteful, streamlined and well-equipped – and the 'Plus' option gets you a sweet maple top. Review by **Gareth Morgan**

This month we're firing up the reviewing furnace and shovelling in another high-end bass with boutique leanings. During the last year or so we've been graced by excellent basses from Sandberg, NS and Elrick hovering in or just outside the £1500-£2500 bracket, so it's comforting to start the new one with another fine example.

Roscoe Guitars hail from Greensboro, North Carolina, and the company emerged in 1980 from an instrument repair and, later, instrument building business set up by Keith Roscoe nine years earlier. Roscoe is a classic example of musician-turned-luthier, learning guitar from the age of 10, jumping over to bass a few years later when an opportunity presented itself. He established his repair business straight from school and eventually started building his own guitars because 'after you've repaired or restored 10,000 guitars you start thinking "I could build these myself"'. The business initially focused on guitars but by the late '90s the situation had reversed, leading Roscoe to focus solely on building basses.

Whilst you can find Roscoe basses on the shelf, so to speak, there are plenty of options available if you choose to order one, from fingerboard wood to hardware colour, headless construction or optional Aguilar pickups. The Century Standard Plus we're reviewing this month has a Bartolini J/MM pickup combination that adds £165 to the basic £2199 starting price.

Bulk of the body is two pieces of swamp ash

Maple neck with dual graphite reinforcement

The body is made from swamp ash, with a beautifully-marbled flame maple top with a satin 'charcoalburst' finish

In form, the CSP represents an intelligent modern take on a recognisable template, with sweetly offset rear bouts lifted straight from the Fender Jazz template, although Roscoe have shortened the body's overall length to move the waist section by about 20mm, a small alteration that results in almost perfect balance in the seated position. While the lower bout becomes fractionally shallower towards the top edge, it's not what you'd call a chamfer, but there's an extensive ribcage provision around the back. The Jazz likeness lessens when you get to the horns: the upper horn is thin and elongated to fall just short of the 12th fret, while the lower is cut away for great access to the highest fret.

The body is made from two pieces of swamp ash, centrally spliced. You can clearly see the gorgeous sweeping grain of the ash on the back, but the top carries a beautifully marbled flame maple top with a Charcoalburst finish with a satin lacquer coat; some might prefer a glossy sheen, but we think it looks dead cool. Note that the light ↦

FACTFILE

Roscoe Century Standard Plus 4JM 4-string Bass

DESCRIPTION **Solidbody bass. Made in the USA**
PRICE **£2364 inc. hard case**

BUILD **Swamp ash body with flame maple top, bolt-on maple neck with 24 medium nickel frets on a pau ferro fingerboard. Gotoh tuners and Hipshot B Style bridge. Chrome hardware**

ELECTRICS **Active with a Bartolini 4.6AP 918 3-band preamp and one Bartolini J pickup (neck) and one MM (bridge). Volume, Pan, Bass/Treble stack knob and Middle controls, three way coil-tap switch (series/single-coil/parallel modes)**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes, add £130**
FINISH **All satin finishes, natural, various sunburst options**
RANGE OPTIONS **5-string from £2375, 6-string from £2575, plus various standard surcharged options, from £40 for a wenge fingerboard to £165 for different pickup configurations**

SCALE LENGTH
864mm/34"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 40mm
12th fret 53mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 21mm
12th fret 23mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 10mm
Bridge 19mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2.5mm
12th fret bass 1.5mm
WEIGHT **3.78kg/8.36lbs**

CONTACT **Bass Direct**
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Sei
Bass
Made in Camden, London, Sei do a top-notch J-type active bass with many kinds of woods, finishes and pickup layouts
RRP **from £2040**

Sandberg
California
Sandberg's California basses come in various pickup configurations, play beautifully and sound great. Prices are pretty bargainous, too
RRP **£1299**

Aluminium Hipshot bridge with chrome-plated brass saddles

A sleek, appealing take on a classic, the Roscoe is excellently built, superly playable, and full of tonal options

coloured line is not representative of a sandwich layer, merely a decorative detail added during the finishing process. Blimey, these chaps have seriously steady hands.

The neck is a three-piece maple affair, each section delineated by a light brown stringer that could be walnut. It's secured to the body using four Allen bolts through a heel that shallows slightly towards the lower cutaway, a nice detail that further improves the access up top. The neck's shallow 'C' contour makes it ultra-comfortable under the hand, and the unfussy hourglass headstock is nicely back-angled to create the requisite break angle for the strings at the black Graphtech nut. The front displays the maker's signature and logo plus four lightweight chrome Gotoh tuners in two up/two down configuration.

Roscoe employs pau ferro (also known as Brazilian ironwood or leopard tree, found in Brazil and Bolivia) for the fingerboard, which carries 24 expertly-seated medium nickel frets and no front position markers, just side markers. Trussrod access is at the body end, with access facilitated by a carved half-moon slot that proudly takes its place as an element of the design. The CSP has aluminium Hipshot B Style bridge with 'brushed' finish; it's a simple and effective unit, a nice, sturdy update on a traditional design.

The CSP has a pair of Bartolini pickups, a J model at the neck and an MM in the bridge position, and these are hooked up to a Bartolini 4.6AP 918 three-band preamp built to Roscoe's own specifications. As well as Volume and Pan knobs there's a Mid control that, if you give it a tug, changes the mid frequency from 800Hz to 250Hz (basically, brighter to darker), Bass/Treble in stack knob form, and a three-position coil tap switch: bridge position is series mode, down is parallel mode, and centre is single coil.

Sounds

With EQ flat and the switch in single-coil mode (centre), the Roscoe's basic tone seems excellent – a pleasing growl from the E string, plenty of width and clarity with a slight zing in the midrange and clean, well-realised highs that open out nicely when you dig in. In series mode (bridge) there's more body to the midrange but the highs are a fraction duller and the E string loses some of its gunning edge, while in parallel mode some raspy acoustic qualities emerge and highs are softer and more melodic. Most of us will more than likely choose one setting and stick with it (we're using single-coil mode here) but it's really well worth spending time on any of these options.

Keith Roscoe talks about sensing the tonal properties of a piece of wood when he selects it and monitoring this throughout the construction process. When you start to EQ the CSP, you might hear what he means; it's nothing radical, but there's something happening underneath, and the bass really comes to life. Dial in some low and you can feel it in your gut, yet this thickening takes place without destroying other frequencies, retaining softer but still well-defined highs. There is a slight nasal zing that can be removed by backing off the Mid a little at 800Hz, although be careful with the cut or you're in scooped mids territory, and that's not a very nice place to be. Boosting mid level induces a fine, fat finger-funk sound or, with a tug on the knob, a huge, punchy tone that only starts to sound boxy on full boost. The Treble control moves you from a little extra brightness to crunch before hitting you with vicious, cutting attack for an effective modern slap tone.

The individual pickup variations are also good: the neck pickup is dark and old-school, but boost bass and middle a lot and treble a little and the nasty, crunching assault must be very close to a perfect modern take on the P-Bass. Perform the same moves on the bridge pickup and you'll find a super-tight sound with generous high-mid gurgle but coated with ample bottom end and a touch of treble spite. It may sound like a strange and impractical mixture, but it's a great setting for serious fun.

Verdict

If you're going to invest a large chunk of your savings on a bass then it has to be good, and the Roscoe Century Standard Plus is really, really good. The build quality is excellent, and the design is an sleek, appealing take on a classic. It's relatively light, and the balance is excellent. The coil-tap switch and powerful, musical EQ means loads of tonal options, and the neck is superbly playable. So if you're looking to make a one-time investment in a life-changing bass, we'd suggest nudging a Roscoe to the top of your 'must see' list.

Gotoh tuners and dot-free pau ferro fingerboard

Volume, pan, push-pull middle and bass/treble knobs plus coil-tap switch

FINAL SCORE

ROSCOE CENTURY STANDARD PLUS 4JM	
Build Quality	**19**/20
Playability	**19**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Vibe	**18**/20
TOTAL	**90%**

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ORANGE
OB1-300 300W Bass Amp

New for 2015, the all-analogue Orange rackmount bass amps let you blend cleanliness and filth to your heart's content. Review by **Gareth Morgan**

Orange may have made their name back in the day with mighty valve heads, and the reissues are still mighty big today with bassists who Prefer To Rock (and, of course, guitarists, but they aren't reading this page). However, they've also gained more than a bit of a name with their valve/switchmode bass amps, the lunchbox-style Terror Bass series. There's also a third, alternative route, though, which Orange is keen to continue to explore, despite the popularity both of very old technology and the onset of new lightweight technology – the old-school transistor-based head... powerful, weighty, reliable and yet still fairly affordable.

Just released at Winter NAMM 2015, the OB1-300 (and its yet more potent brother the OB1-500) comes rack-ready with U-shaped carry handles on the front. It's delivered in a white powder-coated steel chassis that should withstand the rigours of the road. At 9.54kg/21lbs, its solid-state nature makes the OB1 heavy by modern digital standards but, in truth, easily portable.

Controls are on the front panel, seated in the only expanse of orange finish on the unit. Either side, framed in black, you'll find an On/Off switch with orange LED and a jack for the footswitch (not supplied), and the input socket with Active/Passive switch.

Each control is labelled with Orange's familiar road sign-inspired symbols, the bigger black dials being Volume, Gain and Blend (with a most amusing 'food blender' symbol), the latter being an additional controllable gain circuit designed to simulate certain elements that normally only bi-amping achieves, from clean boost to filthy grind. With the active EQ, +/- 15dB is available from Middle and Bass, whilst +/- 20dB is avaiable from Treble.

On the back panel you'll find two speaker out Speakon sockets, a line out jack socket plus an XLR balanced DI out with ground/lift switch.

Sounds

The OB1's solid-state nature means the basic sound is clean and clear with decent width and plenty of low-mid kick. Boosting Bass gives results that are powerful without being excessive, adding a rich thickness to proceedings while still letting clarity breath. The middle control is all about delivering punch and impact with a distinctly dark character, betraying the OB1's rockier leanings in the process, which gets thinner and spikier on higher boost levels, full boost being really aggressive and loads of fun. The Treble dial adds sheen and spike, although its very snappy nature can be mellowed usefully by chopping back the Middle dial a little.

The blend/bi-amp idea is based on the currently hip practice of bassists using both bass and guitar amps to run clean and dirty signals, and the whole point about the OB1 amps is that they offer this facility in one package. The control by itself, in conjunction with Gain, accesses effectively the OB1's line-drive capability. With Gain set low, you get an excellent clean volume boost – it's possibly a touch spikier, but pretty good nonetheless. Dial in more Gain and overdrive creeps in, only really subtly blendable with clean signal before it becomes the overriding tonal factor. The distortion sounds are very decent – fiery'n'nasty, with oodles of raspy grind.

Verdict

The OB1-300 is a fine amp, not massively endowed with tonal variation but delivering excellent fundamentals without fuss via its simple EQ. If the idea of the bi-amp function appeals, we'd suggest purchasing an appropriate footswitch (Orange do one for £27.99) as the ability to stomp your blend setting in and out at will massively increases the amp's usefulness and worth. Although very much a rock amp, anyone with old-school guitar-band leanings would be happy to have one of these sitting atop their stack.

FINAL SCORE

ORANGE OB1-300	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Versatility	**16**/20
Sound	**16**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Vibe	**17**/20
TOTAL	**83%**

FACTFILE
Orange OB1-300 300W Amplifier

SPECS **Single channel 300W solid-state amplifier. Made in China**
RRP **£479**

CONTROLS **Gain, Treble, Middle, Bass Blend and Master Volume controls, Input (with active/passive switch), Footswitch (not supplied) and Line Out jack sockets, two speaker out Speakon sockets, balanced output XLR socket with ground/lift switch.**

RANGE OPTIONS **OB1-500 500W amp, £589; OBC212 2x12" 600W cabinet, £549**

DIMENSIONS **18.9" wide, 10.43" deep, 3.93" high**
WEIGHT **9.5kg/21lbs**

CONTACT **OMEC**
020 8905 2828
www.orangeamps.com

Like this? Try this...

Gallien-Krueger
700RB-II
2U rackmount head with bi-amping capability, delivering about 500W into 4 Ohms. More adaptable than the Orange, and with its own sound
RRP **£399**

Markbass
Big Bang
The Big Bang is a compact 500W digital/solid-state unit that's light and easy to use. Sounds great, too
RRP **£814.80**

Orange
Terror Bass 500
That Orange growl in a far smaller package. No blend control, but you could use an outboard overdrive
RRP **£519**

HOOKED ON CLASSICS

WEAPONS OF DESTRUCTION

The Great Backline Wars of the 1970s led to many a rock band casualty, yet **Phil Harris** wouldn't have missed the experience...

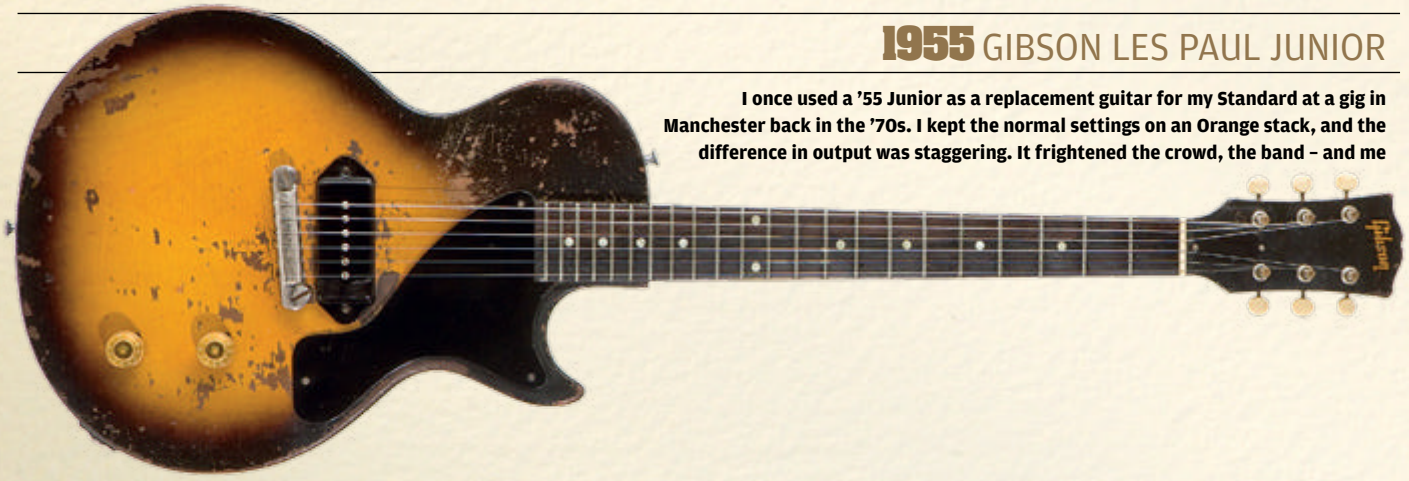
The inspiration for this month's column came while I was trying to find a car parking space at St Thomas' Hospital for the umpteenth ear check-up I've had in my life. For all the times I've written about the beauty and the history of guitars and amps (and will continue to do so), all the joy that this lovely gear has brought me has come at a price. But thanks to wonderful medical advances, I can now hear better than I've been able to in decades, and I feel all the more grateful, knowing that the damage to my ears has all been self-inflicted.

You see, back when I was a young guitar player, if you weren't going through a 100W stack at full volume, then – to put it a bit less crudely than is possible – you weren't considered to be a very well-endowed guitar player. You wanted everything to go up to 11. I knew it was damaging my ears. I didn't care.

'It wasn't about sex and drugs, it was about the rock'n'roll – and volume was all part of the fun'

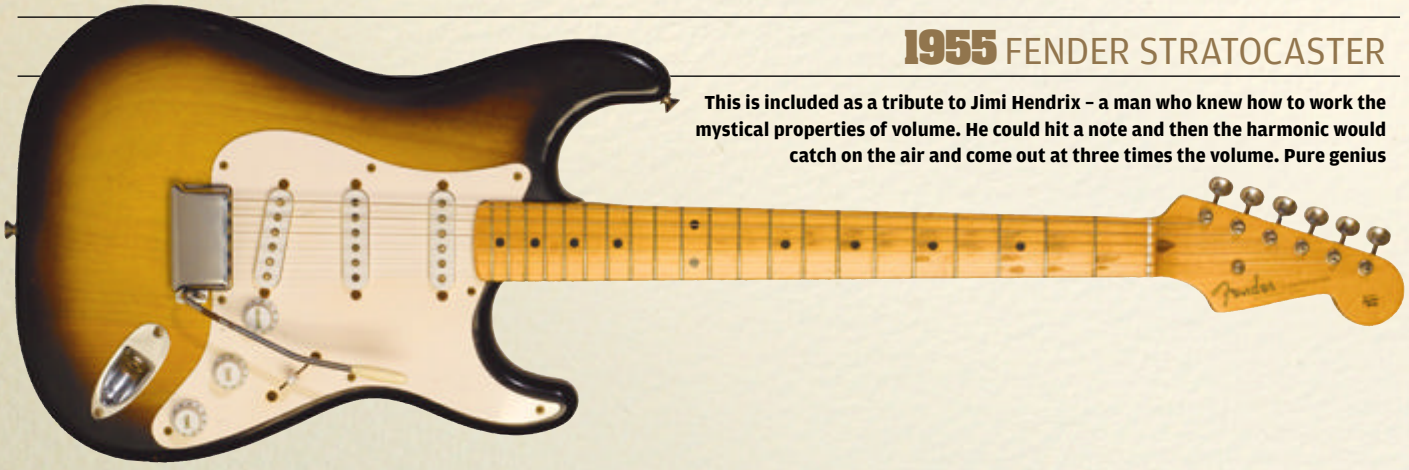
It all finally came to a head in 1974 when I was playing an outdoor gig in Dublin at the end of a tour of Ireland. I felt my neck go cold, and when I put my hand to my neck it was covered in blood. I went off stage, got my ear taped up, and went back and finished the gig (it was what you did in those days). The doctors rebuilt my ear and told me to look after my hearing. At that point you would have had to shoot me in order to take that advice, so it went again a few years later. I've no desire to be disrespectful to the medical profession – and I wouldn't encourage others to follow my example. However, there's a magic to playing the electric guitar very loudly that just can't be beaten. It wasn't about the sex and drugs back then – it was also about the rock'n'roll... and the volume you played and heard it at was all part of the fun. So although I'll be visiting doctors about my hearing for the rest of my life, I don't regret a single moment of it. Here are some examples of things that can get your ears ringing...

1955 GIBSON LES PAUL JUNIOR



I once used a '55 Junior as a replacement guitar for my Standard at a gig in Manchester back in the '70s. I kept the normal settings on an Orange stack, and the difference in output was staggering. It frightened the crowd, the band – and me

1955 FENDER STRATOCASTER



This is included as a tribute to Jimi Hendrix – a man who knew how to work the mystical properties of volume. He could hit a note and then the harmonic would catch on the air and come out at three times the volume. Pure genius

1967 MARSHALL HEAD AND CABS

This Super Lead Plexi and cabinets were prime weapons of a guitar player's sonic arsenal. The looks alone were enough to make you want them, never mind the sounds you could get – and the amount of air you could push. Plugged into this stack, you really felt like a true guitar player

1970 HIWATT AP200

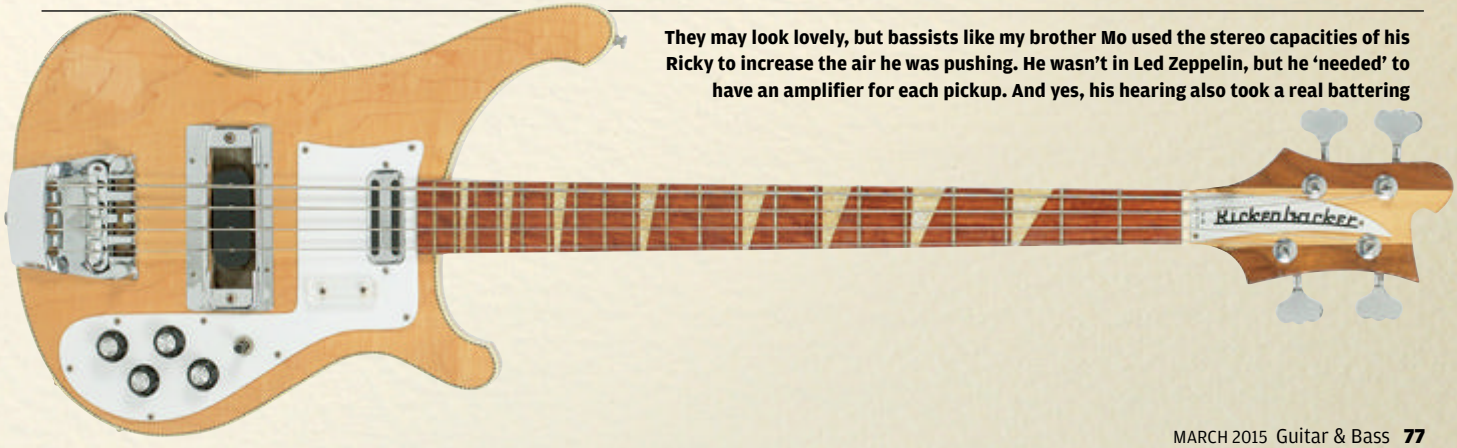
A Hiwatt is an essential part of any 'vintage volume' collection. In terms of the sheer output, this amp could more than hold its own with anything. This is one of the many amps I played way above safety levels in pursuit of the best sound possible, even when in the studio

1964 VOX AC30

By the early '70s combos already seemed to be from a bygone era. However, I did use them in a pop band I was in around that time; I had two AC30s daisy-chained into a 200W Hiwatt head that was plugged into two JBL D130S cabinets... and that was just part of my setup!

1971 RICKENBACKER 4001

They may look lovely, but bassists like my brother Mo used the stereo capacities of his Ricky to increase the air he was pushing. He wasn't in Led Zeppelin, but he 'needed' to have an amplifier for each pickup. And yes, his hearing also took a real battering



BASS Station Alpha

We love seeing bass collections, and this one's a corker. Paul Dunbar is fixated on acquiring the long-for instruments of his youth, and that means Fenders, Hofners, items from Vox, Burns, Guild... and a spectacular array of Gibsons. Interview by **Lars Mullen**

'Many players and collectors from the 1960s seem to have a similar answer to that familiar question, "How did you get into guitars?"', says Paul Dunbar. 'It was just so cool to own a guitar – well, usually the good old red Hofner was the closest you could get to the unaffordable pink Strat in the guitar shop window – and there were all these heroes you could aspire to being if you could just thrash out a chord or two.

'As a kid, I wasn't quite in that gang of wannabe players, though I was in a gang, a bike gang... well, we had bicycles! I was hanging out with two lads called Alan McKay and Charlie Williams, and we all had Dawes bikes. It felt good, as it seemed really trendy to hang out in a bicycle gang listening to early rock'n'roll!

'It soon became obvious that riding around on a pedal bike wasn't as cool as playing guitar, so Charlie bought a Fender Strat and Alan purchased a Rosetti Airstream finished in ice blue... and they said that if I wanted to remain in the gang, then I had to buy myself a bass!

Pure '60s: a Vox Phantom IV, a Burns Sonic and a refinished Danelectro Longhorn from 1961

'We're talking about the early '60s, and at that time – apart from the few mainstream guitar shops in the big cities – guitars and amps were sold in places that also sold TVs and radios. In Jim Moore's Music Shop in Hornchurch in East London I found a Burns Sonic Bass, which cost a pretty enormous 25 guineas, bought on hire purchase. I have one today – it's identical to the one I first bought, and it dates from late '63. But back when I was 12 years old, I had to pay for my Burns bass by riding hundreds of miles doing paper rounds in all weathers on the famed Dawes bicycle!'

Paul has two other basses that are strongly of the early/mid '60s. 'This Vox Phantom IV bass dates from the mid-'60s,' he says, 'and it has a massive neck. The Danelectro

Hofner basses: '63 Senator, '65 Violin Bass and a '63 Artist

Longhorn bass is an original from 1961 but I've had it refinished, as someone had decided to hand-paint it in matt green. I bought these three to serve as a reminder of the great years I've had playing in a variety of bands, and they're all basses that I probably couldn't have afforded at the time.'

Our next trio of basses are all Hofners. 'I feel that Hofners are really important milestones in early rock'n'roll,' says Paul. 'On the left is a semi-acoustic archtop Senator Bass from '63, which plays beautifully; unplugged, it's as loud as any acoustic bass I've played, with a gorgeous tone... ideal for casual late-night bass noodling.

'In the middle is a Violin Bass from '65 – this one doesn't have side position markers, which I find a little frustrating! And finally on the right there's a red solidbody red Artist Bass, also from 1963.'

Back in the 1960s, Paul used his Burns Sonic bass for quite a while in the 'bike gang'. 'Charlie had the coolest guitar, the Strat of course, but Alan upgraded his Rosetti Airstream for an Epiphone Casino, so to keep up, I traded in the Burns for a Fender Precision bass,' he explains. 'By this time, Fenders were becoming a little easier to find in the UK. The Precision made a huge change from the short-scale Burns, of course, but I was tall for my age, so I could handle the extra weight and the extra length of the neck.

'Considering that the three of us were all still at school, we had some pretty nice instruments between us! None of us were old enough to drive, so we had to cart a heavy Vox AC30 around the streets – we all simply plugged into that one amp.

'As a band we progressed quite well, and played a lot of early rhythm and blues. But in the late '60s, Charlie, Alan and myself decided we'd had enough, so we split... and I sold all my gear. Many years followed of just casually playing a lot at home, but then in the '80s I started playing in bands again, using an Ibanez Roadstar bass.

'Before long I part exchanged the Ibanez for this black '83 Fender Precision, with some nice figuring on the maple board. This one was advertised as one of the last American-made Fenders just before they were produced in Japan, and it was responsible for starting the bass collection I have now.

'Since that time I've bought this '65 sunburst Precision with a rosewood fingerboard as a reminder of that first one I had in the bicycle gang; this is used quite a bit for gigs. It's very similar, in fact, with a "tug bar" on the scratchplate below the strings so you can play with your thumb. This other sunburst Precision, which is a '78 with a maple fingerboard, has a thumb rest above the strings so you can play with your fingers.

'Back then I did love Precisions, but in my heart it was always a Fender Jazz Bass that I really wanted. I always liked the sound and that narrow neck. These days, I've got several.

'The black fretless Jazz is from 2000... it does take a little time for me to get my head around playing a fretless sometimes, especially putting my fingers in a different position.

'I sometimes use this white Jazz from '74 – the extra attack you get from the maple fingerboard is quite apparent. Note once again the different positions of the finger and thumb rests between this and the sunburst one on the right, which is a '69: the '74's rest is above the strings, the '69's is below. 1974 was also the year they moved from tortoiseshell to black scratchplates.

'As for the '69, if I'm playing new material in a band that I'm not that confident with, then I'll take this one out, no question about it. It's been my first choice for live work for a long time now. I'm currently playing bass in two bands – a blues outfit called Big Fat Shorty, playing some pretty obscure material like the Red Devils, and a pub rock band called the Lazy Sundays. The big, warm sound of the '69 Jazz is ideal for both bands.'

Next up is a fabulously cool trio of Fender Competition Mustang basses. 'One of my favourite bass players was Alex Dmochowski from Aynsley Dunbar's Retaliation, and he often used a Fender Mustang bass. I always liked the simplicity of them, and the short scale... there's a powerful midrange tone going on, and because they're strung through the body, there's a fair amount of sustain too.

'All three of mine have the "competition" stripes. The yellow one dates from '69, and the blue one and the red one are both from '73. The stripes, I think, ran from the mid-'60's to around '74. The yellow one is ↔

Three Fender Precisions: a black '83, a sunburst '78 and a sunburst '65

Fender Jazz Basses from 2000, 1974 and 1969

Fender Competition Mustang basses from 1969 and 1974

Fender Tele basses from '74, '68 and '69

the scruffiest of the three, but it's a beautiful little bass to play. It also has an early example of Leo Fender's string damper assembly at the bridge. You can see that the body is covered with wear marks – someone played this for years wearing a bracelet of some kind. I'd love to be able to mind-read these old basses... I find it fascinating to think of where they have been and the stories they could tell.'

The Fender Telecaster bass has earned a reputation as a real workhorse, and Paul has three examples to choose from. 'I have one version from '72 with a humbucker at the neck, plus two earlier ones that are almost identical apart from the way they have faded over the years. The creamy one in the middle is a '68, and the slightly pinker one on the right is from '69. Telecaster basses are really solidly made, with great playability and a very distinct sound, but the trade-off is the weight of them – mine are all pretty heavy.'

The basic plan behind Paul's collection is to try to acquire the basses he lusted after as a youngster, and in the same approximate order. 'That isn't always easy, and while waiting for a decent example of a particular model a different one will often catch my eye,' he laughs. 'The best way seems to be "while looking for one, buy something similar"!

'For example, I was looking for a Fender Bullet bass, but the first one to show up was this little short-scale version built in '82, and it looked so nice in its fitted case in the shop that I bought it.

'Since then I've found this nice example of the long-scale model, the Bullet Bass Deluxe, from the same year. I get the impression that the Bullets basses were a mismatch of parts such as Tele necks and Mustang pickups...

'I'd love to be able to mind-read these old basses. I find it fascinating to think of where they have been and the stories they could tell'

they were using up stock before they started to build Fenders overseas in '83. The short-scale versions are really easy to play, and they're popular with guitar players who just want to dabble with a bass or lay down some tracks in a studio.

'This little Squier Musicmaster with the matching headstock also fits into that category. It couldn't be any simpler – one pickup, one control knob. The pickup is one of the Vista Series pickups, purposely designed for bass, rather than the Strat guitar pickup they used with a cover over it. This is a fantastic little all-round bass.'

Fender Bullet Bass Deluxe, short-scale Bullet Bass and a Squier Musicmaster

Next on the list are two lesser-seen Fender basses. 'On the right is a USA-made JP-90, and on the left is a Mexican-built Stu Hamm signature called The Urge with active pickups and a double-octave fingerboard,' says Paul. 'I've got several active basses, but I think The Urge has the best tonal range of them all, while the JP-90 was developed in the '90s from a combination of my two favourites, the Jazz and Precision. The body is slightly downsized, but with this hardware and spec it makes for really good value as a secondhand buy, and it sounds amazing.

Paul also has an impressive assortment of Gibson-made basses, although not all of these have arrived in the 'order of want'. 'I was initially after a Gibson Thunderbird bass with a reverse body, but a single-pickup '64 Gibson non-reverse Thunderbird surfaced first, and I had to have it as it was one of the models that was in the Selmer catalogue we used to read when we were kids, so it became the next in the collection.

'This one used to belong to Paul Martinez who played bass with a host of major artists, including Robert Plant. Looking at the stickers on the case, he must have done a few world tours with it. It's a great bass to play, with a thin neck and a lot of drive from the centrally-mounted pickup.

'Soon afterwards I heard about this reverse Gibson Thunderbird from '65, also with a single pickup, so I had to have that one as well!

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Fender JP-90 and a Fender Stu Hamm The Urge bass

1965 reverse Gibson Thunderbird, Epiphone Embassy Deluxe and a '64 non-reverse Thunderbird

'I've also since picked up this cute Epiphone Embassy Deluxe, and I thought I'd put it with the Thunderbirds for the photo shoot today as they all came out of the same factory and share the same hardware and scale length.'

For the next three, we stay with Gibson and with solid bodies. 'This Gibson EB-O dates from '59, and the single humbucker at the neck has a fearsome growl. There's evidence that this bass has seen some serious work – there's a groove that's been carved above the E string by a lot of players' thumbs... or maybe just one thumb over many years! There are also some very small holes on the top side, which fit the reverse shape of the scratchplate, so at some point it's been used left handed.

'This EB-O is of course the early version, with the Les Paul Junior body shape; later models had the SG shape, like these two EB-3s, which are both from 1969, and the only two of all my basses that are almost identical to each other. The four-way switches offer a variety of sounds including a really low thud – a bit like the baritone switch on an Epiphone Rivoli. They're not the most versatile of basses, but for that big reggae vibe, or if you want an Andy Fraser-type sound, you play one of these... it's as simple as that.'

Paul has a particularly soft spot for semi-acoustic Epiphone and Gibson basses. 'Back in my school days I used to follow a band called Scrooge And The Misers, and the bass player had a blonde Epiphone Rivoli. They were dream basses in the early '60s, so many years later I went on the quest for a Rivoli.

'It just so happened that while I was looking for a Rivoli I came across a Gibson EB-2 for sale in a local guitar shop. In reality it's more or less exactly the same bass, as they came out of the same factory and look almost identical aside from the headstocks, pickguards and a few other details.

'On the left of this group of three is the '63 Rivoli that I finally found. It has an unusual three-tone sunburst; the following year they only used the two-tone shade, as seen on the Gibson. This Rivoli also has the black flanged plastic pickup cover that Gibson used up until '64, when they changed to metal covers.

'About a month after I bought the Rivoli I saw this other one, finished in a shade of burgundy and built in '67. It was in a guitar shop, and I had just dropped in to buy some sheet music. I didn't think much of it as I already had one, but I was curious as it didn't have a price on it, so I tried it out while the guy did some research. He came back saying even though it was a bit scruffy, they still wanted about £225 for it. Well, I wasn't going walk out with just the sheet music after he'd he said that! The finish was indeed pretty rough, but it was mostly just layers of nicotine, so I took it to Bob Barry, who is based in Birmingham and looks after all my basses, and he did a great job cleaning it up.

'Connoisseurs of these basses will be aware of the slight change in profile over the years of the top horns, going from "Mickey Mouse" ears to a slimmer profile. I just love these basses... they have such a sexy shape!

'Another Gibson semi-acoustic bass I have is very different – a '74 Gibson Les Paul Signature Bass. It has just one pickup smack in the middle and has a really usable sound – I've considered using this one live recently.

'Staying with semis but going back to Fender for a moment, here's one that never seems to be in the spotlight, the Fender Coronado bass. It was designed by Roger Rossmeisl, who had previously designed guitars for several of the major brands, including Rickenbacker. He learned his ↦

'59 Gibson EB-0 bass and two 1969 EB3s

'63 Rivoli, EB-2 and '67 Rivoli

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Les Paul Signature bass and a '68 Coronado II

Epiphone Olympic guitar next to an early Newport bass

Ibanez EDB605 and Guild B-301

trade as a youngster at the famous Mittenwald school of guitarmaking in southern Germany, which had an almost trademark kind of binding that he introduced to the Rickenbacker line, and you can see a similar resemblance in the Coronado. The model I have is the two-pickup Coronado II – and it's got both a finger rest and a thumb rest!

'I love recording with this bass – I seem to be able to get a really big live sound with a small amp that's working hard. To be honest I can't really crank it up through a big amp. It's hollow, without a centre block for the pickups, so there's too much feedback. This one was built in 1968, and is still in perfect condition.

'I also have a quite rare early-'60s solidbodied Epiphone Newport bass, which was basically Epiphone's answer to the Gibson EB-O. This particular bass came over from California via eBay. It's an early model with the black plastic pickup cover and it was built before they changed the body shape to have a smaller lower horn... it's the same body profile as on this six-string Epiphone Olympic guitar from '67.

'I don't have that many six-string guitars, but I thought the Newport would make a nice photo with the Olympic Double. During its life it's been upgraded with a pair of mini humbuckers, and a lot of friends have offered to buy this one – it's such a screamer when you crank it up.'

Next, Paul arrives with three more solidbody Gibson basses that reflect the late '70s. 'The '70s was a time when Gibson was looking to produce something a little alternative, and the Ripper, Grabber and G3 basses are the classic examples. All three have the same large bodies, but they're quite thin, so they aren't that heavy. The Grabber was a lot brighter-sounding than previous Gibson models, especially with its maple body. The G3 is basically another version of the Grabber that had an innovative sliding pickup design, but with three single coil pickups instead. All these basses balance well on the shoulder, play great and have a tight, well-defined sound – especially the Ripper, which comes with the four-position rotary they call the "Q System" which is designed to fine-tune the humbuckers.

'When I bought the Grabber, the guy in the shop offered me a really good deal if I bought this Guild B-301 as well,' Paul recalls. 'This has now become quite a sought-after little bass.'

Next to the Guild is a real rarity in Paul's collection, a – shock, horror – five-string bass. I personally haven't had the need for the extra low B,' he explains. 'So many legendary bass players managed with just four strings! I can understand if someone has a problem reaching down the bottom of the neck, though, and with a five-string you can drop across. I only have one here right now; it's an Ibanez EDB605 Ergodyne with an onboard EQ that boosts the mids and highs. I quite like the quirky look, but it's an oddity in the collection and stays at home most of the time.

'Let's go back to Gibson basses for a minute: these next three are all from the Victory Series from the 1980s, and I believe they were designed by Chuck Burge... he was part of the Gibson research and development team from that era, which was housed in the basement of the old Kalamazoo plant.

'The two-pickup Custom model in the middle of the photo is quite rare, as I'm told only 250 were produced. The one on the left is a silver single-pickup Standard; both have series/parallel switching and use Gibson's VII humbuckers. They're great basses with double-octave bolt-on necks.

'The black 22-fret Q80 on the right is one of the ↔

'The Victory series was designed by Chuck Burge from Gibson R&D, and you can see how the basses were influenced by the Precision'

Standard, Custom and Q80 basses from Gibson's Victory line

L-R: Gibson Ripper, Grabber and G3 basses

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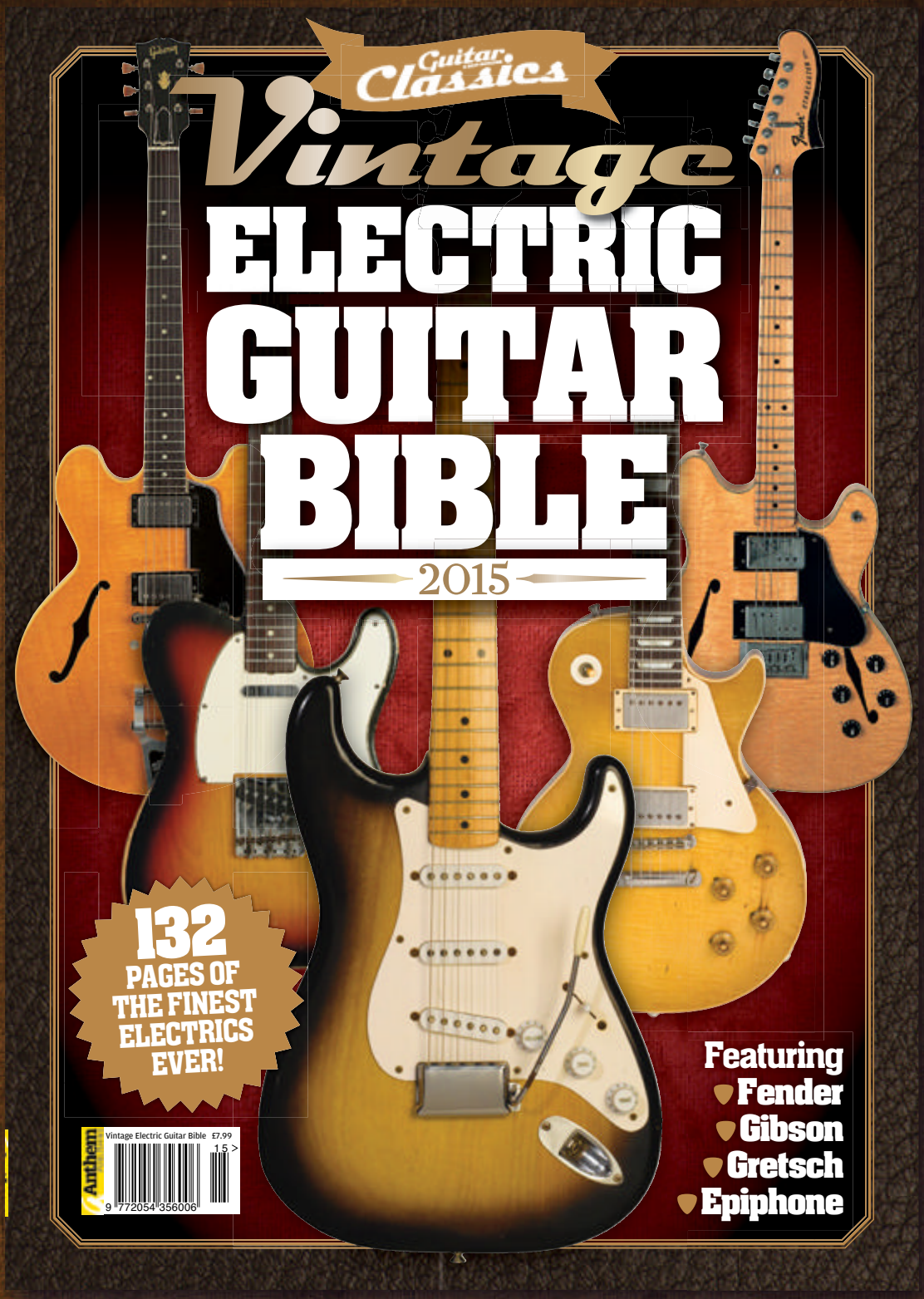

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Les Paul Triumph bass, Gibson IV bass and RD Artist Bass

lower-spec'd Victory series basses. It's still a real workhorse, though, and you can see how Chuck Burge was influenced by the good old Fender Precision for the Victory design.'

We're still not finished with Paul's Gibson basses, and the next to emerge is the four-stringed variant of the low-impedance Les Paul guitars built between the late '60s and mid '70s. 'The Gibson Les Paul Triumph bass is an upgrade of the Recording Bass. It was one of the company's flagship models at the time in terms of build, and also very sophisticated when it comes down to the electronics. Apart from the normal pickup selector switch and volume and tone controls, the extras included high-low impedance switching, phase-controlled low impedance pickups and a three-way tone selector switch, where one position I'm told is supposed to sound like a Fender Precision bass. I believe it was designed by Gibson and Les Paul himself, and it was really expensive at the time.

'This Gibson IV bass also doffs its cap toward a Precision in terms of the body shape. It doesn't really have the "drool" factor, but it sounds pretty nice... there's a kind of big, woody vibe going on from the solid mahogany body and the set neck.

'Surprisingly the IV isn't that heavy, but this RD Artist Bass with its Moog active electronics certainly is. Quite a lot of younger bands seem to be pickup up on these right now. It was launched around 1979, and it was a result of Gibson working with Bob Moog and with Who bassist John Entwistle. It was also Gibson's first-ever active bass. I did read that Entwistle walked away from the project. Although it was never a hit, it did overtake the Ripper bass in terms of sales in the late '70s.'

Paul certainly has a hankering to seek out lesser-known models, especially those from the big brands, and his black Gibson V Bass is a fine example. 'These were only produced for about 18 months, as was this Explorer bass from the mid-'80s, which came with these graphics as original. This is a cool rock bass and it sounds pretty great, but transportation is something else... the case is more or less the same size as a wallpaper pasting table!'

The V Bass and the Explorer inspire Paul to dig out another unlikely major-name weirdo from the '80s, a Squier Katana bass. 'This is a fairly inexpensive model from 1985, and in reality it's a P-bass plus a pointy headstock and a chamfered body design. It was aimed at the metal market, and aside from the body, it does sound and play like a Precision. They must have sold a few at the time, but I haven't seen many around.'

Next to the Katana is a blocky, squared-off bass that even some confirmed vintage freaks would be unable to identify. 'This active Gibson 20/20 is both very rare and rather unusual, and it was available in Ferrari red or luna silver, like this one. It was designed by Ned Steinberger, as you can tell from the body design complete with flip-out leg rest. This bass was produced in very small numbers – I've heard that no more than 100 were built between late '87 and early '88.

'I really like this bass, and even though it has a small body it seems to balance fairly well on the strap. I found it on eBay in the USA and it didn't even reach the reserve price, so I contacted the guy and we came to an agreement.'

For the last bass in Paul's collection, we were half expecting a bass from the future... but he walks in with a real oldie. 'I've saved this Gibson EB-1 until last as it goes way back to '53, and it's the oldest one in my collection. It's a simple bass, but it features several designs that were later seen on many Gibson and Epiphone models... the wrap-around bridge, for example.

'This is a short-scale bass, comfy to play, and even with a one-piece mahogany neck and solid mahogany body it still only weighs around 8.4lbs. I love the painted-on f-hole, the unmistakable body shape and the banjo tuners. The single alnico pickup under the brown Royalite cover measures 16.28k Ohms and has a huge, meaty output. Once again, if only these classic vintage instruments had log books so we could tap into the history of them! I'd love to know where they've been, and how they've survived.'

Paul with 1953 Gibson EB-0 bass

Two from the '80s: a Gibson V Bass and an Explorer

Squier Katana and a rare Gibson 20/20

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HARMONIC ENHANCEMENT

Players have been mixing and matching string gauges for decades, but a new collaboration between Elixir and Taylor has resulted in what they reckon is the perfect custom set. **Martyn Casserly** finds out more

Justin Fogleman (left) and Andy Powers (right)

Great partnerships litter the history of guitar music. Lennon and McCartney drew the best out of each other thanks to a healthy rivalry; Malcolm and Angus Young have been the unshakeable bedrock of driving riffs for decades; and the combination of Jimi Hendrix and a Fender Stratocaster gave birth to some of the most iconic music the world is ever likely to hear. Of course, not all collaborations can be as glamorous and world-changing as those mentioned above, but some have a practical use that means we, the normal folk, get in on the action.

Andy Powers and Justin Fogleman might not be immediately recognisable names, but the companies they work for – Taylor Guitars and Elixir Strings, respectively – most certainly are. Recently a partnership was announced between the two manufacturers, which sees a custom set of Elixir strings being fitted to all of Taylor's Grand Concert and Grand Auditorium models, from the 300 series upwards. Now while some might think of this as simply a marketing move, the truth is that it all stems from two men, Andy and Justin, wanting to solve an old problem caused by guitars, strings, and bothersome physics.

'Consider for a second how an acoustic guitar works,' explains Justin, Application Engineer at Elixir Strings. 'The strings apply tension to the top of the guitar. When the strings are plucked they vibrate the soundboard, which pushes air out of the soundhole and produces the sound you hear. If you don't have enough string tension, it lacks the inertia to move the top of the guitar. Too much string tension will restrict its movement. The trick is to find the perfect mix.'

The new Elixir HD Light hybrid string set aims to solve this conundrum by taking a workaround solution that some wily guitarists have used for years, and one that Andy Powers, Taylor Guitars master luthier, experimented with when he was a solo guitar builder and restorer.

'I'd find myself wanting to put a medium set of strings on smaller body guitars in

order to have the robust lyrical quality on the treble strings,' Powers explains. 'Often, those guitars were not stable and strong enough to support the tension of that size string. A light set of strings was about right and felt nice to play, so what many players chose to do was include the two plain strings – the E and B – from a medium set and use the wound strings – the E, A, D, and G – from a light set. That string arrangement works out pretty well on many of those older guitars as a nice compromise, and it became a setup that I used frequently.'

A few years later Powers was working on rebuilding the Taylor 800 series guitars, and a meeting with Fogleman sparked the idea of making the custom set a reality.

'Shortly after I joined the Elixir Strings team,' says Fogleman, 'I went to visit Andy to introduce myself. Taylor Guitars had been using Elixir strings for quite a while, but I was curious if we could help with any new projects they were working on.

'He quickly showed me the new 800 series guitars and talked me through the wealth of improvements they were making to the line. Andy had a really clear vision of how, as a luthier, he could influence the sound of the instrument.

'However, he had run into a problem: he needed the right set of strings to get the most out of the smaller body styles within the 800 series. For the Grand Concert model, a light .012-.053 gauge set didn't have enough string tension to drive the soundboard, while the medium gauge .013-.056 set had too much, and restricted the soundboard. He needed something in between those two sets.

'This is when Andy shared with me a hybrid set of strings he had tried on other small bodied guitars. He strung up two Grand Concert guitars – one with light gauge strings, the other with the hybrid set – and gave me one to play, while he played the other. We took turns improvising over some chord changes, and by doing this it became really apparent how much more bold and articulate the guitar became with the hybrid set of strings.'

Encouraged by their discoveries the two continued to explore the possibilities of a custom set that would bring the best out of the 800 series.

'We had some great conversations,' says Powers, 'and I kept coming back to this hybrid set of strings, which wasn't an off-the-shelf option. After some more investigation, we settled in on the idea of using an in-between gauge – a .025 third string – that gave us the feel we liked, and the tension profile I wanted to use.'

This became the HD Light (.013-.053) set, which contains the lowest three wound strings from a light gauge set, the highest two plain steels from a medium set, and the aforementioned .025 gauge third string to balance the tone and feel (.013, .017, .025, .032, .042, .053). With these refinements in place it was time to put the combination into practice, and see whether other players shared Powers and Fogleman's enthusiasm. The set was launched and, judging by the feedback, it's been something of a success.

'The response has been very positive,' says Powers, 'and players are finding this particular set hits that "just right" balance other strings haven't been able to.'

Taylor guitars obviously share the same opinion, as HD Light sets are now fitted as standard on all Grand Concert and Grand Auditorium shape guitars in the 300 series, up through the line to the Presentation series. This is no small thing as, especially on acoustic guitars, the strings become the most tactile element of a guitar when a prospective player tries a model for the first time. As Powers explains though, there is a good reason why Elixir and Taylor have an already strong partnership.

'The basic reason we continue to choose Elixir strings – they last. When I finish building an instrument, I string it up, then

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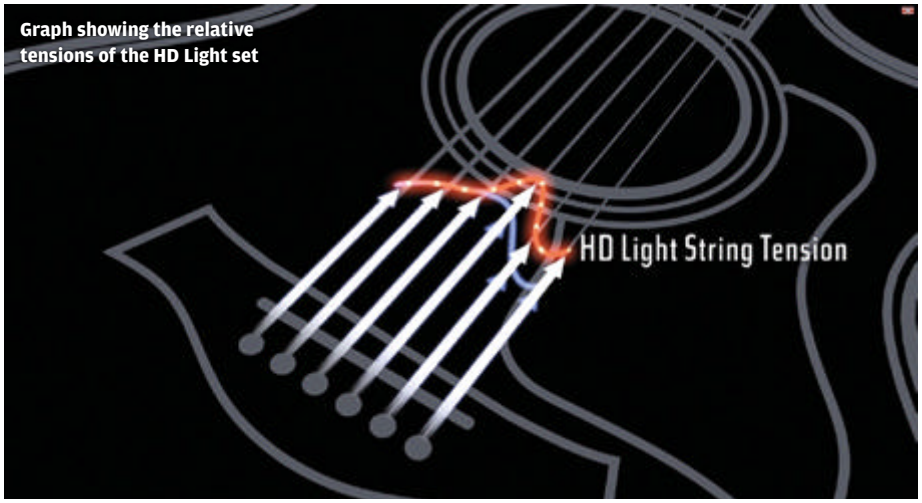
play it, and put it in its case. Then the case goes into a box and is shipped to the music store, or to the far corners of the world where it may hang on a wall for months before it is purchased by a player. I'm rarely certain of where a guitar goes, unless I built it for someone I know personally. Often, several players will try the guitar before it finally goes home with a musician.

'So, a guitar may very well be fitted with that first set of strings for six months or a year, and well played before the instrument finds its home in the right hands. A year-old set of strings on that guitar? I don't want to evaluate any guitar based on the sound of a year-old set of strings. I want a set that sounds fresh, and the Elixir coating allows that.'

So with the HD Light experiment a hit, are there any other innovations we can expect to see from the Powers/Fogleman power-combo?

'We're always looking for new ways to collaborate,' says Fogleman. 'There will of course be more in the future, but nothing we can share just yet.'

HD Lights come in phosphor bronze and 80/20 bronze



Graph showing the relative tensions of the HD Light set

Suzi Quatro's 1969 Gibson Les Paul Bass

Suzi Quatro arrived in England in 1971 with a Gibson Les Paul Bass which, she joked, 'weighed more than I do', and used it alongside her Precision for the better part of five years. **Steve Clarke** visits Detroit's first lady of rock to check out the iconic heavyweight

All photos: Steve Clarke, except inset right by Mike Prior

I'm up early this morning as I head down to the home of Suzi Quatro. The whole idea had come about while I was working late on a guitar repair, and on the radio was Suzi narrating a BBC2 documentary on the subject of *Kalamazoo Gals*, the book about the ladies that worked at the Gibson factory during the war. It was a wonderful story, and being a musician herself, Suzi demonstrated an understanding, a passion and enthusiasm that is rarely evidenced these days. I remember thinking 'I wonder if she still has that old Les Paul bass I used to see her with on *Top Of The Pops* and in many pictures?'

After making contact about the bass, I was expecting to be taken to a lock-up in the middle of nowhere by a guitar tech, but instead I was instructed to go to Suzi's house. This was very unexpected and also a lovely gesture, as it would give me the opportunity to ask a couple of questions about how she came to purchase this weighty instrument.

On arrival, Suzi led me to what she calls her 'ego room' which is full of memorabilia. As you glance across the room, in the corner stands her Les Paul bass, flanked by her BC Rich Suzi Quatro Signature Bass and Rich Bich Bass. The Les Paul bass commands the attention, though; the dark walnut finish still looks classy, as if it really means business.

The Les Paul Bass is sometimes referred to as the Les Paul Recording or the Les Paul Professional bass, but these were the names of corresponding six-string guitars: Gibson's own literature only ever describes this exact model – which was built between 1969 and 1971 – as the Les Paul Bass. It's also occasionally confused with Les Paul Triumph bass, but the Triumph was the Les Paul Bass's replacement, taking over in the early '70s and staying in production until the end of the decade. Both the Les Paul Bass and the Triumph Bass were primarily designed as recording basses for the studio. Though they can also make good live tools they are relatively uncommon, and Suzi Quatro is one of the very few players who, for a time, made one a trademark instrument.

I asked Suzi where she bought the Les Paul Bass, and she said that before she came to the UK she actually went to the Kalamazoo factory to get it. When told what was going to happen to her bass in terms of opening it up and checking the inner workings, she reassuringly gave us the go-ahead.

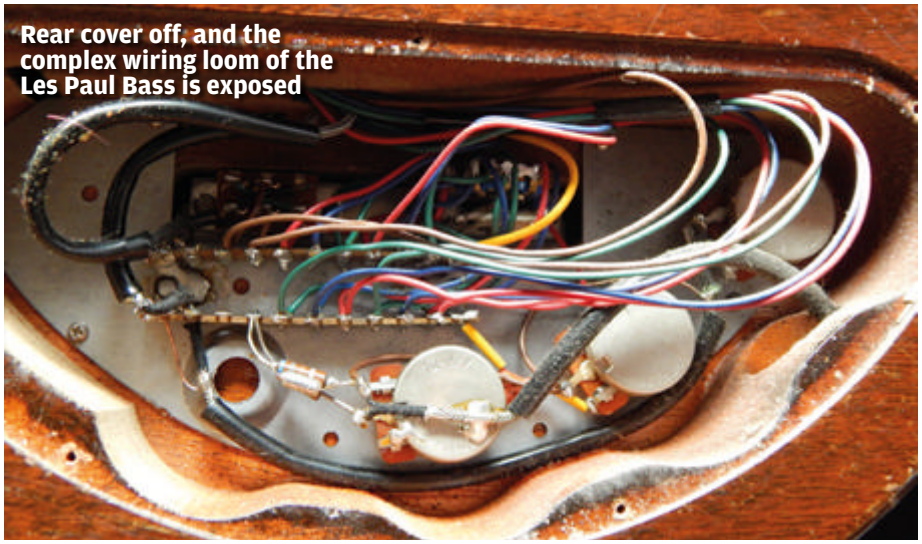
Electrics

The first thing to do is take the bass over to a window to let natural light fall upon it, then carefully lay the guitar down and flip it over to reveal the control plate. This is going to be interesting... and when opened up, wow – at first sight, it looks as if it contains more wiring than the average house. Red, green, blue and brown wires are coming from the pickup cavities and distributed around the components: all very tidy. There is no movement in any of the wires when the instrument is turned from side to side, which is a benefit of the stiff, high-grade wire staying in place and not shifting around to cause potential failures or dry joints in this busy assembly (having said that, the solder joints are some of the biggest blobs of solder I have ever seen).

As the Les Paul Bass is a low impedance instrument – the later Triumph Bass offered the benefit of high/low impedance switching – it needed a low impedance amp, such as the Gibson LP12 released at the same time, which consisted of an LP1 preamp married to an LP2 cabinet. Another way to plug in was to use an AD1 low-high impedance transformer cord, which was an optional Gibson extra.

Pots

To date this bass, a number of factors are considered. Firstly, all three pot codes are visible and read as 1376944, which takes us to 1969 in the 44th week (October), 137 being the manufacturer, CTS (Chicago Telephone Service). Pot codes should not be used to date a guitar alone, but used only as a guide when the serial number is missing or a re-spray has taken place. However, knowing the period of time that these basses were actually produced and that Suzi picked it up from Kalamazoo herself, it's extremely likely that the pots do date from shortly before the bass was built. Interestingly, this Les Paul Bass is fitted with a tiny Sprague capacitor in place of the usual bigger striped ones seen in many other Gibson models.


Rear cover off, and the complex wiring loom of the Les Paul Bass is exposed

Switchcraft pickup selector on the upper bout

Black mirror-top knobs for volume , treble and bass. Note the 'position pins'

Gigantic low-impedance pickups with three mounting screws and Gibson-embossed covers

The revolutionary pickups weigh just under a pound each and come with three layers of windings, with a control to select between them

Pickups

It was around 1967 that talks began with Gibson about Les Paul's idea of low impedance pickups. These pickups were revolutionary at the time due the fact they gave a very clean sound. The first guitar to use them was the Les Paul Personal: the slanted low impedance humbuckers

Three-way coil-tapping tone selector and a phase switch for when both pickups are switched on

Selector switch has an archtop guitar-style rubber grommet

Serial number and Schaller tuners

Chipped logo and a crown inlay

Woven leather strap is fastened to the bass by super-hefty screws

were designed to give a broader string response. The guitar pickups used 24 gauge wire, but the larger bass units – a pickup measures 138mm by 414mm – were of 32 gauge wire. There is approximately 160 feet of wire in each pickup, and the coils were sealed in a thick epoxy that kept everything in place. The pickup part number on the Les Paul bass and Triumph from 1969-71 is 13555 on the front and 13560 on the bridge. Typically on this model each pickup would have three different layers of windings, with a 'tone selector' control to choose between them.

Our pickups have an impedance of just over 50 ohms, and when carefully decoupled from the body, without putting the wires under tension, they prove to be unbelievably heavy – just under 1lb each. The cavity is about one and a half inches deep and the routing is clean, with no splinters anywhere. The pickup height can be adjusted by three screws, and the black pickup cover has the 'Gibson' emblem embossed on the top.

The tone switch on this bass gives incredible variety (though perhaps you wouldn't expect anything less from Mr Les Paul). Position 1 gives extra deep bass, position 2 gives normal frequencies of around 66.2k, and position 3 will give a high-pitch sound at 127.9k. The pickups are surrounded by an attractive chrome plate that sets the look off well, and all the screws are larger than you would expect to see on any Gibson guitar.

Controls

On the upper bout is a Switchcraft toggle sitting in a very tidy well-cut cavity with no rough edges. The selector switch is suspended with a thick rubber grommet, as you'd expect to see on an ES-175. Volume, treble, bass controls are marked with escutcheon pins set into the body itself. There's a three-way tone selector switch, similar to a Telecaster unit: this one has lost the plastic tip. The switch connects to a coil tap circuit with a phase switch on a small oval chrome plate. Interestingly, the bass control on this guitar actually adds a little volume when you turn it up, but leaves the treble unaffected.

Weight

Are you sitting comfortably? Well, you'll need to be, as this bass weighs in just under a whopping 12lbs. By rights Ms Quatro should look like the hunchback of Notre Dame, but she doesn't and she also clearly has no problem carrying the beast. The body is two inches thick, pancaked or cross-banded with a maple sandwich between the mahogany, and measures and 14" wide by 18.5" long. As you can imagine, the weight does have an effect on the sound. The type of Honduras mahogany used by Gibson at this time and into the '70s is a dense wood that had absorbed many minerals. Supporting this weight is Suzi's

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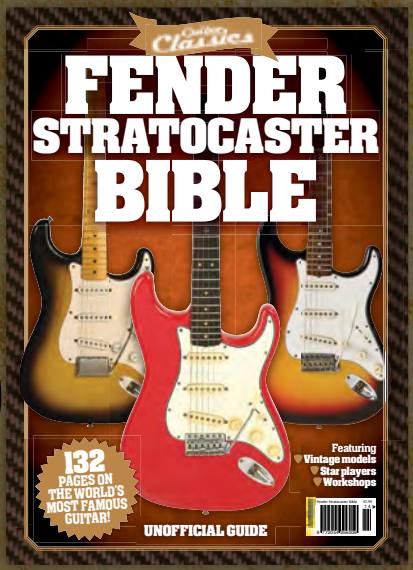

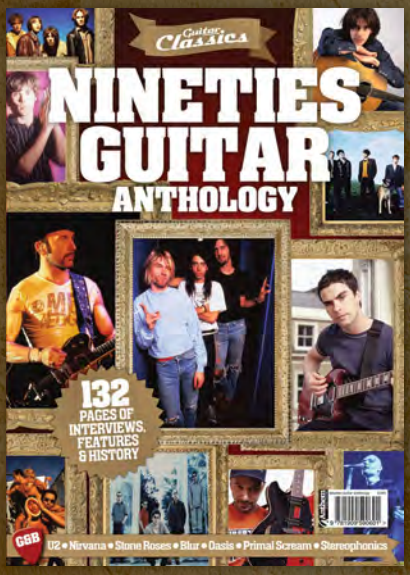

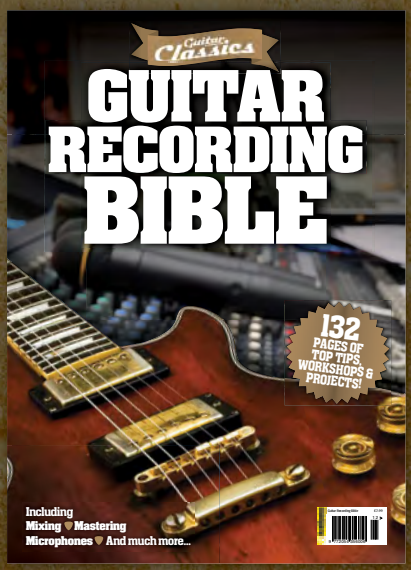

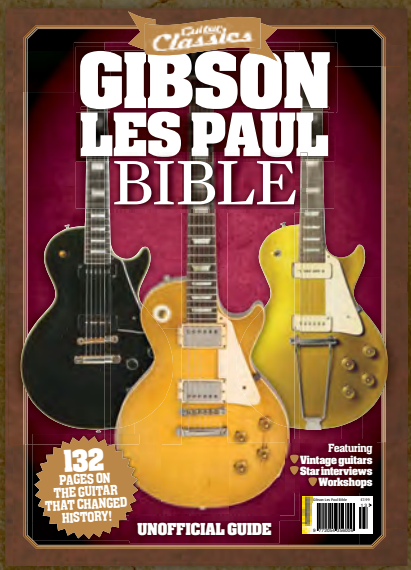

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original leather guitar strap, which is bolted to the guitar and has a massive brass buckle. To see the strap in action, check out Suzi's playing *Can The Can* on *Top Of The Pops*.

Finish

The finish is not that bad considering its working history, and the lacquer is still good with none of the usual checking that you'd expect to see on a guitar of this vintage. There are lots of dents and scratches, though, plus a wear patch between the front and rear pickups where Suzi would have rested her thumb. The back of the neck still has its lacquer intact.

Neck

The back of the headstock shows the number 860401; because of Gibson's sometimes erratic numbering system it can be a bit of a challenge to pinpoint an accurate date, but this number does date to around 1969 and when added to what we learned from the pots, it's a good guess that 1969 fits.

The neck is made of three pieces of mahogany with added wings visible on the headstock, which saved wood by not having to machine a wider piece of mahogany. At the time this bass was built Les Paul Deluxes had a one-piece neck, but they didn't receive the cross-banded body until a little later.

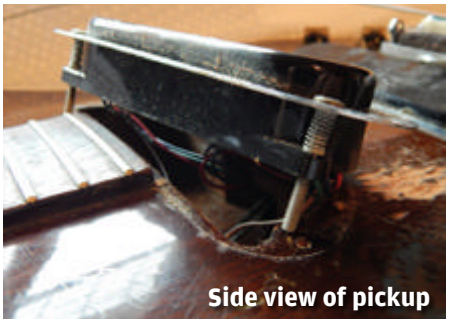
Clearly, Gibson had a blueprint of a model when they started production on its guitars but, like any manufacturer, made slight changes for improvement along the way. Even Gibson's catalogues could not be relied upon when looking at hardware or construction as a pre-production model very likely had differences, and this bass is surely one of few built in this way.

This fingerboard is Brazilian rosewood: the rosewood is quite open-grained, similar to what you'd expect to see on late-'50s guitars. Later guitars have rosewood fingerboards with a more tight-grained appearance. The fingerboard is in very good condition with no visible shrinkage or sunken grooves, and the fret ends are nice and smooth. The abalone dots are well cut and feel smooth and flush to the fingerboard.

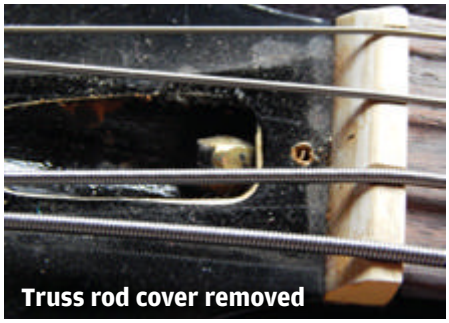
I don't normally measure the fingerboard, but I did on this one and will explain why. This fingerboard measures 23" from just in front of the nut to the end of the neck, and has 24 frets. The scale length is 30.5" and joins the body at the 16th fret, and measures 53mm at this point. This all adds up to the fact that a lot of the neck and fingerboard goes into the body, and this makes for a good coupling and string vibration connection, giving huge stability and sustain.

Suzi agreed that a little TLC wouldn't go amiss at this point, so as the fingerboard was very dry I oiled it with linseed oil. I also adjusted the truss rod as it was starting to back bow, although the strings are not rattling

At $495, the Les Paul Bass was outpriced in the range only by the semi-hollow EB-2D bass



Side view of pickup



Truss rod cover removed

The fingerboard was all the better for some linseed oil but the truss rod is too loose to have any effect, and Suzi tells us that she's always had issues with it

because the action is quite high and the notes are clear. Having oiled the fingerboard twice it took on a luxurious dark chocolate look, and seemed all the better for it.

The truss rod, however, is a different matter, as it's too loose to make any noticeable difference to the neck. I have a '73 Les Paul Custom with exactly the same problem. The only way to get some correction for this is to put a piece of wood with spacers underneath it near the 5th and 7th fret area, clamp it, and then heat it for about 45 minutes, keeping a close eye on the neck. When you remove the clamps you should have a slight dip in the fingerboard so that the truss rod becomes tight again to allow some degree of adjustment. Don't try this at home if you are unsure about the process or if you lack experience, as you could damage the lacquer. The problem is not that serious on this neck: I have seen much worse, but it is worth keeping an eye on. Suzi did tell us that she's always had issues with this truss rod.

The chrome-plated Schaller M4 machineheads are actually original, and work perfectly. I did tighten the screw on the D tuner slightly to adjust the torque. The pearl 'Gibson' logo is damaged between the letters 'b' and 's'. The headstock inlay is a pearl crown, which looks great alongside the dot fingerboard. The nut is 38mm wide and seems to be original: it's well cut with no overhang at either end, and is made from bone. The strings sit well in their slots,

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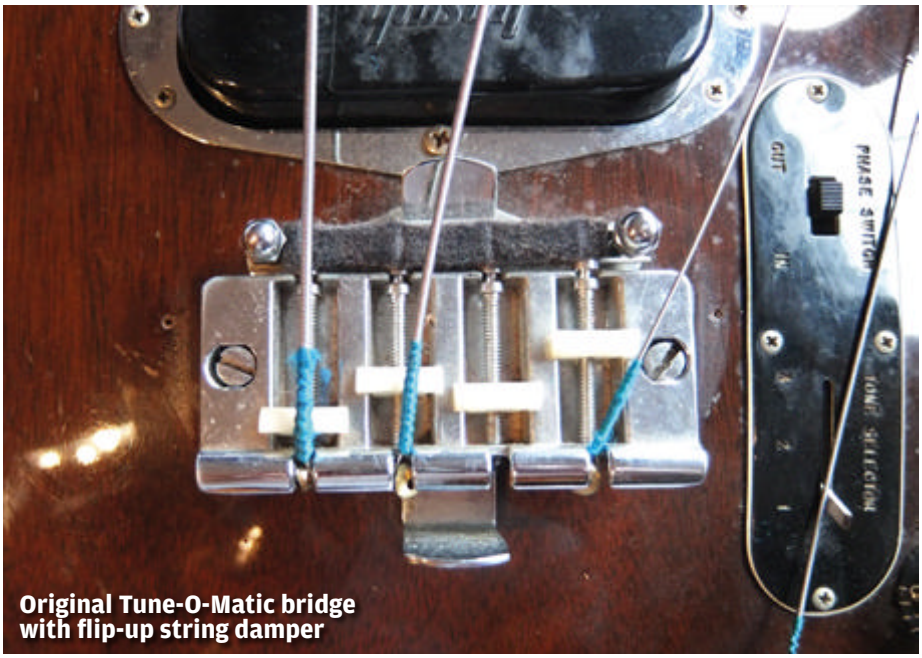

Original Tune-O-Matic bridge with flip-up string damper

Fine Brazilian fingerboard with pearl dots and worn frets

The nylon saddles are replacements

although the E string could have gone a little deeper as it covers just half of the string.

Frets

The frets are medium-sized and not too fat, but after all this time they have suffered visible wear and are now flat-topped with no proper crown on top. This bass could definitely benefit from a fret dress and a re-crown, and the chances are that there is just about enough wire left to do it. This work would improve the intonation and tone; having said that the intonation is reasonably good, but there are slight intonation issues as you go further up the neck due to the wear.

Bridge

These chrome-plated Tune-O-Matic bridges started to appear around 1967, and came with nylon saddles; these saddles are non-original, but nicely cut. Around 1971 or '72 chrome-plated saddles started to appear, and a string-mute was fitted up until 1971. The idea was that by pulling the lever away from the bridge, a raised part pushed a piece of felt up underneath the strings to dampen the strings, giving a dampened sound: the strings on Suzi's bass are not muted. The bridge is a two-point type that allowed the separate intonation of each string, and it sits on two hex screws. If the screws become worn then the bridge will tip forward, which can cause problems with action and intonation. The action in this case is a little high from around the ninth fret upwards but the bass is still comfortable to play due to the thin neck profile.

Summary

It's been fascinating to look at this bass. Les Paul's inventiveness had a huge effect on electric guitar design; his feelings about low-impedance are at odds with current player preferences, and this was no doubt also the case in the early '70s, when the lack of sales for the original Les Paul Bass led to the introduction of the high/low impedance Triumph (the Triumph was also slightly thinner-bodied and came with a ribcage contour, but it was still a heavy bass). It would be easy to dismiss the original LP Bass as a studio-only tool, but it was ahead of its time, and with the right set up for live use it will offer a thunderous sound with clarity and definition. You really can feel the frequencies hit your stomach when you play this bass.

We would like to say thank you to Matt Ingham of Cherry Red Records and to Dorothy Howe for their help making this feature happen, and especially to Suzi Quatro for allowing us access and providing so much additional information.

Steve Clarke of Famous Frets is an experienced guitar tech and repairer and can be contacted via email at stacmusic@yahoo.co.uk

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DRILLS FOR
THRILLS

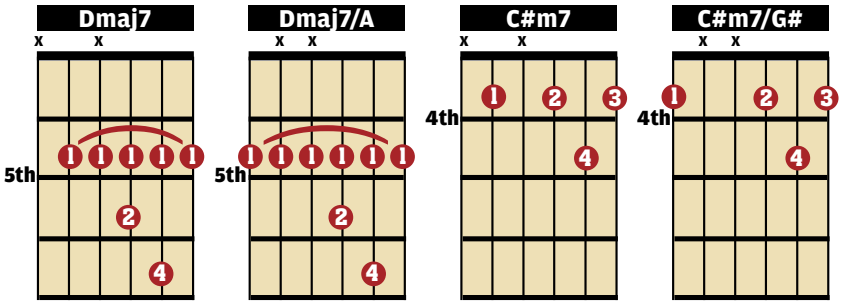
Alternating Reality

More great chords, and now with a percussive bassline running along beneath. Neat, or what?

Following on from last month's *Drills For Thrills*, here's another progression to be played in a percussive accompaniment style, courtesy of the plucking hand – but this time with an alternating bassline in the low register. While this alternating bassline gives the fretting hand more work to do than if it was just holding down a single chord shape for each bar, the real workout is for the other hand; getting the accompaniment pattern smooth and even with an effective percussive click or thud at a brisk pace can be tricky. As ever, practise very slowly at first, and then gradually build up speed over time.

1 DMAJ7, DMAJ7/A, C#M7 AND C#M7/G# CHORDS

Since we're going to be striking the strings with the three fingers and thumb of the plucking hand, these are all four-note voicings. Dmaj7 consists of the root (D) on the fifth string, the major seventh (C#) on the third string, the major third (F#) on the second string and the fifth (A) on the top string. Dmaj7/A is the same chord but with the fifth (A) in the bass. The 'x's on the inner strings simply reflect the fact that we're going to be using three fingers and the thumb rather than strumming. C#m7 consists of the root (C#) on the fifth string, the minor seventh (B) on the third string, the minor third (E) on the second string and the fifth (G#) on the top string. C#m7/G# is the same shape but with the fifth (G#) in the bass.



2 BASS WITH PERCUSSIVE EFFECTS

4/4 TIME

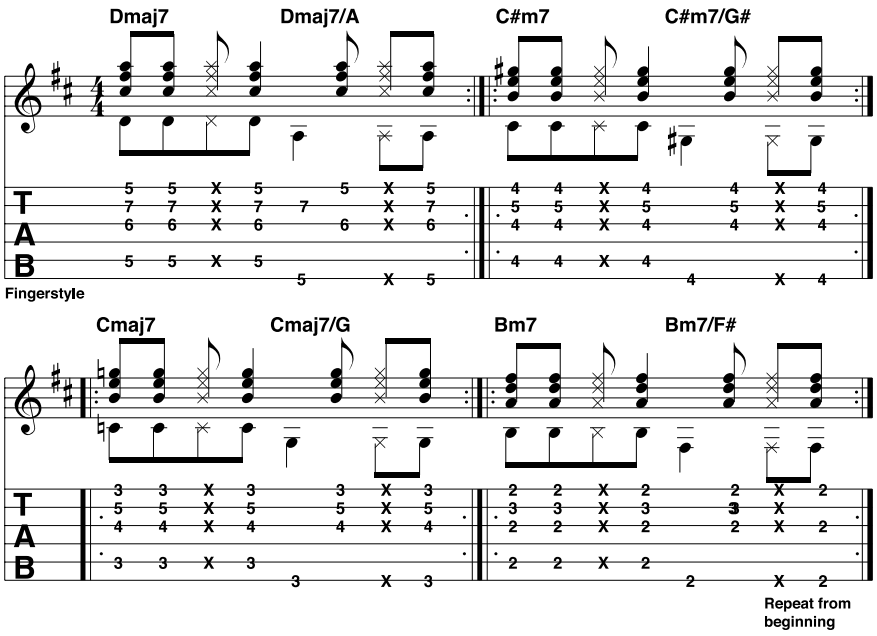
The technique required to play this was explained last month, but here's a brief recap for those who missed it. What you need to do is to pluck the top three strings with the index, middle and ring fingers, and the bass notes with the thumb. For the 'x' notes, use the fingers and thumb on the strings they struck before, but use a degree of forcefulness to create a kind of percussive click. For a more extreme effect, when putting the fingers back on the strings hit the upper body of the guitar with the front of the wrist to produce more of a thud.

Care must be taken when changing the bass note from Dmaj7 to Dmaj7/A, as the upper three notes are designed to be sustained while the bass note changes, so you can't simply lift the first finger then replace it, since you'll lose the upper notes. The way to do this is to plan ahead and finger the Dmaj7 chord with the first finger slightly higher than normal so that the first finger can reach the bottom string without having to be replaced. This technique can also apply to bar 3 with the change from Cmaj7 to Cmaj7/G.

The chord shapes for Cmaj7 and Cmaj7/G in the third bar are simply the Dmaj7 and Dmaj7/A from Exercise 1 moved down by two frets. The Bm7 and Bm7/F# chords in bar 4 are the C#m7 and C#m7/G# from Exercise 1 moved down by two frets.

Harmonically, the exercise starts in the key of D major then works down to the relative minor of B minor in bar 4, with the roots of the chords at the beginning of each bar – Dmaj7, C#m7, Cmaj7 and Bm7 moving chromatically downwards. Once you've reached the end, repeat from the beginning.

Play very slowly at first to get the plucking hand technique under control, then start practising at crotchet = 60 and aim for 140.



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We always carry a great selection Fender & Squier guitars, basses & amps. Amazing selection of American Standard Series guitars & basses in stock. It's been 60 years since Fender introduced the Stratocaster. Full range of 60th Anniversary guitars now in stock. Prices start from £364

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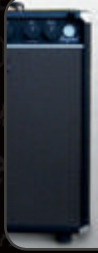

Two-Rock are incredible sounding, hand built boutique guitar amps, made in Rohnert Park, California. Two Rock Bi Onyx Head, Two Rock Studio Pro Plus Heads & Combos, Two Rock Sensor Heads & Combos. **Huge selection in stock, from £999. New Two Rock Crystal models just released. Prices start at £2299.New Two Rock Bi-Onyx 40 just released. Prices start at £2559**

fano guitars

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We buy secondhand guitars - bring yours in for a quote & try something new at the same time

Fender CUSTOM SHOP

WHEN YOU'RE READY A Custom Shop guitar embodies everything Fender has learned over 60 years of building the world's most revered electric solidbodies. The finest materials, all the right details, hand built in Corona, California – it's the guitar of your dreams, realised.

WE HAVE THE GUITAR FOR YOU Coda Music is Europe's biggest and best Fender Custom Shop dealer, so whether you want a perfect New Old Stock, vintage-correct model, or the heaviest of Heavy Relics with a raft of custom playability tweaks, you'll find it here and with over 100 in stock in one store you won't find a better selection anywhere.

UNIQUE TO US, UNIQUE TO YOU Our extensive in-store stock includes many custom ordered guitars, built to our own exacting specs after years of buying, selling and playing these fabulous instruments.

CAN WE BUILD IT? Yes we can! If you have that extra special something in mind, we can work with you to make it a reality. Custom orders can be ready in a matter of months and cost less than you might think – call us, email us or drop in to discuss your perfect combination of features.

Echopark

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Koll

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Collings GUITARS

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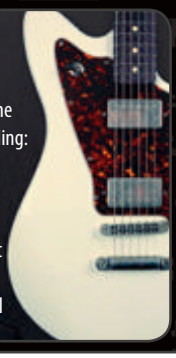
K-Line



Nice fresh shipment of K Line guitars now in stock, including:
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Founded in Akron Ohio in 2004 Earthquaker Devices have become one of the hottest names in the boutique effect pedal market. With a host of celebrity axe slingers adorning their artist roster and a passion for continuing to push the envelope on guitar pedal design.

BadCat

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Carr

Great selection of models and finishes, Europe's number one Carr amp dealer. Carr Skylark now in stock, prices start at £1999.

Mad Professor Amplification

Founded in Finland in 2002 Mad Professor Amplification have been dropping the jaws of guitarists and producers all over the world with their array of simple to use and truly amazing sounding pedals. Coda Music are delighted to be stocking this awesome range and have them ready to demo in both of our stores!

Lowden guitars are made under direct supervision by George Lowden in his hometown in Downpatrick, N Ireland.

lowden GUITARS

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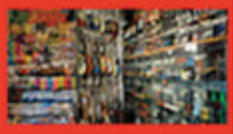

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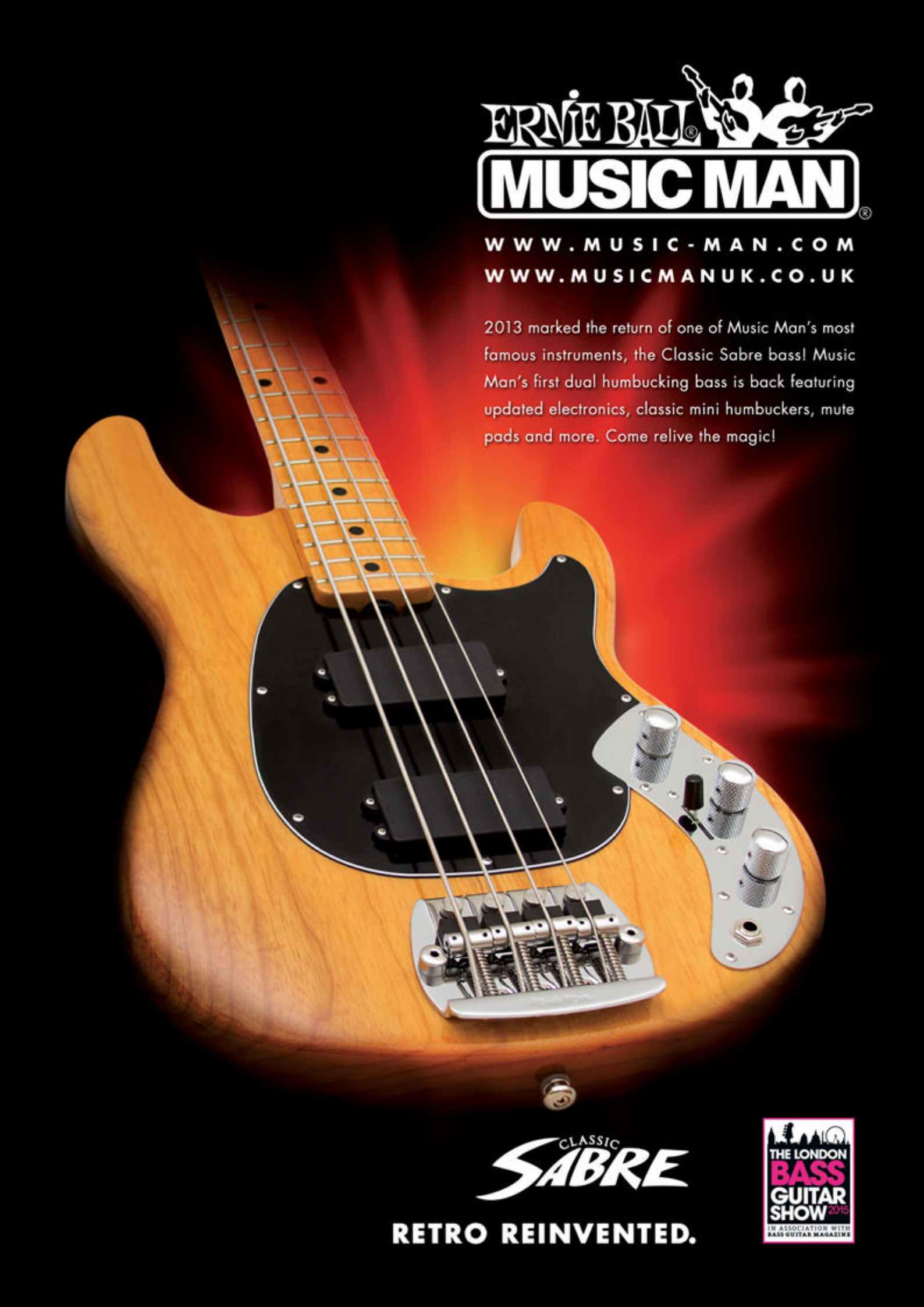
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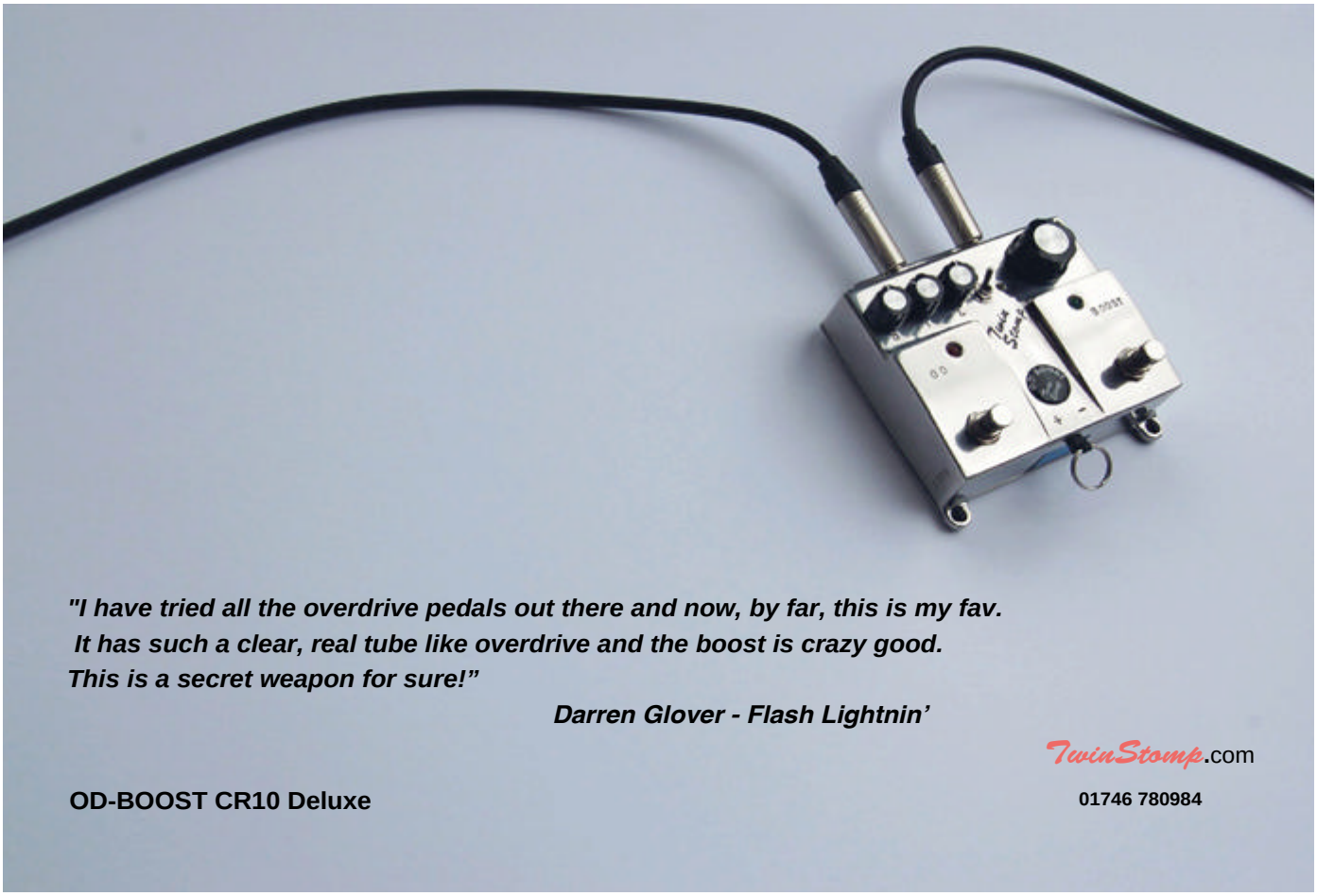

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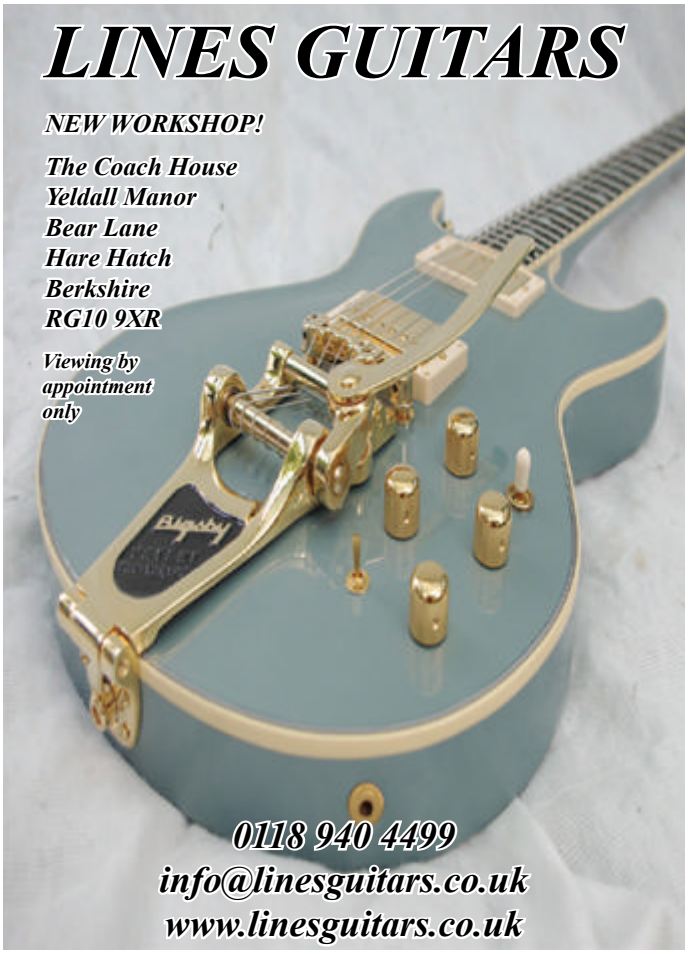

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Gibson ES-335 Dot Plain Top cherry red 2012 model with hardcase COA, £1800 ovno. Tel: Adam 07872 318288, Feltham, Middlesex

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Fender Hotrod Deluxe MkII, unused, £495 or will p/x for Blues Junior MkII plus cash; Fender 2004 Anniversary Strat, pristine, unused, custom case, £1098. For the pair, £1584. Tel: Tony 01442 876740, Herts

WEM Dominator Mk3, classic vintage EL84 combo, Celestion Heritage 30 Greenback speaker, excellent condition, serviced, nos valves, £650. Tel: Steve 07811 411067 or email feversteve@hotmail.com, Dorset

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Dean resonator, engraved chrome, gold coverplate, piezo/magnetic pickups, £300. Squier Affinity Tele, white, unplayed, £100. Squier Hello Kitty Strat, black, VGC £230 ono. Buyer collects. Tel: 01225 862255, Wiltshire

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Gibson J-200, '60s, authentic blonde, 24 made, limited edition, AAAA timbers, part of collection, unplayed, plus case. Cost £3750, to sell £2450. Tel: Alec 0151 480 9746, Liverpool

Fender Custom Shop '69 Strat with Tele neck, '69 Abby wound and signed pickups, case, mint condition, £1600 no offers. Tel: 01617 930241, Lancs

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Squier Super-Sonic Japan, late '90s, blue sparkle preferred. Call Ron 01384 873390, Stourbridge

Gibson Les Paul R9 Plaintop 1997-2003 Historic Custom Shop, original to 'player', fair price paid. Tel: 07814 797163 or email glen1149@hotmail.com, Devon

Digitech RP-6 or RP-7. Must be good condition and price, may collect. Tel: 07923 801153

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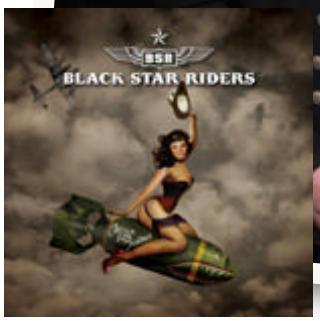

As Phil Lynott's one-time right-hand man and half of the famed Thin Lizzy 'twin guitar sound', Scott Gorham's place in rock'n'roll history is assured. He served the band from 1974 until its demise in 1984, becoming the longest-standing member after Lynott himself and drummer Brian Downey. The band reformed in 1996 as a tribute to Phil, who died in 1986, with early Lizzy man John Sykes taking up the vocals and both Gorham and Downey on board. Sykes left in 2009 with ex-Almighty man Ricky Warwick stepping in, and when Downey grew tired of touring in 2012, ex-Megadeth drummer Jimmy DeGrasso took the seat. That line-up of Thin Lizzy, completed by Damon Johnson (guitar) and Robbie Crane (bass), went into the studio and came out reborn as Black Star Riders. The debut *All Hell Breaks Loose* resonated with strong echoes of that glorious Lizzy sound we know and love, and the latest album *The Killer Instinct* promises to forge even further afield.

Terry Reid

TERRY REID

He didn't seem to be a big superstar kind of guy, he played guitar... but what a voice! Really punchy with tons of energy, he took his chops from the gospel side of things and he did amazing vocal trills. *Superlungs My Supergirl* just blew me away – and bear in mind this was back around 1971. Everyone should check him out!

Stevie Ray Vaughan

COULDN'T STAND THE WEATHER

I don't understand how anyone could not like Stevie Ray Vaughan. He played on 13 gauge strings and he could bend them all the way to heaven! He was quick and he really knew how to pick the notes out, too. I love his version of *Voodoo Chile* and there's a whole load of brilliant live stuff. A real loss.

The Jimi Hendrix Experience

AXIS: BOLD AS LOVE

Are You Experienced was groundbreaking stuff but I think it was this album that really made everybody go "How is he doing that?!" It was like he was a magician. I met him once when me and some buddies snuck our way back stage before a gig. He could of had us kicked out but he was really cool. An amazing guy.

Cream

DISRAELI GEARS

This is the band I grew up with. Those guys made music on a level of accomplishment that we just hadn't heard before. I saw Cream four times: the first gigs were brilliant, the third wasn't so good, and the fourth all they did was jam, but they were a big influence on my life. I learned to play listening to Eric.

Led Zeppelin

PHYSICAL GRAFFITI

It's tough to choose a Zeppelin album but I've gone for this one. I love the sounds, it's a got a really cool flow, and everybody is playing their ass off. Of course Led Zeppelin were all about the riff and Jimmy Page came up with some of the mightiest ever heard. You heard the music and it stopped you in your tracks.

The Beatles

SGT. PEPPER'S LONELY HEARTS CLUB BAND

The guys that got me thinking about writing music were the Beatles. It was unheard of that bands could write their own stuff when they came over in 1963. I still clearly remember peeling the cellophane off of this album the day I bought it. Consistently brilliant all the way through, this album changed everything.

Lynyrd Skynyrd

SECOND HELPING

I actually went to school with Ed King in Glendale, California, and Ed was the guy who wrote the riff to *Sweet Home Alabama*. Ed formed a band called Strawberry Alarm Clock and they had a hit with the song *Incense And Peppermints* before he joined Skynyrd. That was a kick up the ass. I thought, if Ed can do it, then I can too.

Joe Walsh

BUT SERIOUSLY FOLKS...

He's a goofy-looking guy but he's the one member of the Eagles who always looks like he's having a great time, and I love that about him. He was also in a great band called the James Gang. *Life's Been Good* kinda takes the piss out of the life but it's the ultimate feel-good song. *Rocky Mountain Way* isn't on here but I love that too.

Pink Floyd

THE WALL

I've played with David Gilmour many times and he'll tell you himself he's not a fast player. But he just knows how to pick the right note at the right time and he gets a great guitar sound every single time. I think his playing on *Comfortably Numb* borders on perfection. His attitude to guitar is a big influence.

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